



# EMBRACING TECH IN FINANCIAL SERVICES EPISODE: ROBOT CO-WORKERS IN THE CONTACT CENTRE – NOT WHAT YOU THINK

## TRANSCRIPT

**Host: Tim Broome,  
Technology Advisory  
Practice Lead, Financial  
Services, Accenture  
Australia and New  
Zealand**

**Guest: Kelly Owens,  
Customer Insights &  
Growth Practice Lead,  
Financial Services,  
Accenture Australia and  
New Zealand**

**Tim:** It's been reported that call centres will be

killed by bots, but can humans still thrive in this new age of technology? Well, let's explore this further with today's guest.

**Presenter:** Welcome to Embracing Technology in Financial Services, a podcast brought to you by Accenture. In this 16-part series, we will hear from experts to uncover the latest in technology and trends in Financial Services. Now, here's your host, our practice lead, Tim Broome.

**Tim:** I have the pleasure today of being joined by Kelly Owens, who is our customer insights and growth lead for Australia and New Zealand. Kelly, how are you?

**Kelly:** I'm great. Thank you for having me.

**Tim:** It's a pleasure to have you here today. So, you've been with Accenture how long now?

**Kelly:** Six months.



**Tim:** And how is it?

**Kelly:** It's been really good experience. I've felt very welcome. I've been learning a lot. It's great to be a part of this organisation and being able to take a broad range of solutions and capabilities to the market.

**Tim:** And it's a pleasure to be working with you.

**Kelly:** Thank you.

**Tim:** So, the topic for today is contact centres and the evolution of technology and automation, all those things that are changing the way that we can operate with contact centres. But just before we jump into that, what is customer insights and growth?

**Kelly:** Well, the customer insights and growth practice focuses our clients around their customer proposition. So, starting around, what really is your customer strategy? How does it tie to your brand strategy? And then, what are all of the enabling capabilities that you need through the whole of the organisation. So, not just in contact centres but the rest of the channels, how does it then play into your products and your services and basically how everything plays out as the customers would see them.

**Tim:** I've been looking at contact centres from a technical, technology lens for the last couple of years. And as we've seen AI starting to emerge and become a bit more mainstream, I just see the opportunities there are so huge. But from your perspective, how are you seeing the evolution of the contact centre?

**Kelly:** Well, we're definitely seeing that blend of human and digital, and every institution that I work with is on their own journey with regards to what that's going to mean for them. Where they're looking to invest, where they're looking to prioritise across channels, and then how that then impacts the contact centre.

Many are also looking to simplify their tech stack, moving things to the Cloud, moving things to new capabilities that will enable them to have more of a digital focus, whether that means AI or bots or streamlining of the agent experience. That's all up for grabs as well. So, there's no one way that anyone's looking to do it. Everyone's on their own journey.

**Tim:** Organisationally, are you seeing it as a drive through the servicing and sales part of the business or through the digital business? Because I think you can probably tackle it on either side.

**Kelly:** I think most institutions are looking at a channel story. How do our channels need to play out? And so, it's part branch and retail, it's part contact centre, and it's part digital enablement. All of them are looking for some form of digitisation of the business. And even if



we look at the branches, there's more digitisation going on in the branches.

But at the end of the day this has to come out in terms of a channel story. Which customers are going to want which channel? Which transactions, which customer outcomes, need to be serviced in different ways? And looking at it more from that perspective than a traditional point of view around "This is how the contact centre needs to play into that," it's really more around what outcomes do we want to drive?

The other thing about contact centres is that the shift is moving back from a pure cost channel to a growth channel or an engagement channel. How can we use the channel to promote loyalty, how do we get closer to our customers? How can we use our agents differently to promote all of those things?

**Tim:** So, when we're talking about the loyalty side of things - and I guess that's one of the key focus areas - how is technology enabling that?

**Kelly:** Well, through a more streamlined desktop, and it's an example, agents are focused less on the screen set in front of them in a traditional swivel-chair type of scenario and being able to focus more on the customer and the transaction that's in front of them. Not that customers are transactions, but people call a contact centre because they need something.

So, [what we've seen](#), for example, is a 5 to 10 percent increase in CSAT (Customer Satisfaction) due to transactions being handled more quickly, as well as an increase in employee satisfaction because they're less tied down with toggling between different systems and screens and, again, focused more on serving the customer.

**Tim:** That's a really interesting point, especially on the employee side. So, I did a piece of work a couple of years ago in and around a contact centre, where actually we were interviewing members within the contact centre just to understand what they did and what the opportunity was for automation. And we found that 50 percent of the questions they came in were readily automatable from we could produce a response that would mimic what the person did. The follow-on effect of that is rather than people being concerned that they don't have a job, they actually get to focus on the

more complicated questions, which is what they really get pleasure from. So, from an attrition perspective, it actually seems to be a good thing rather than a bad thing.

**Kelly:** That's right. As I said, employee satisfaction seems to be up when digitisation and AI is being used appropriately and even in the bots. So what we're seeing is that agents can establish deeper relationships with the customers, they can focus on things more like preventive outreach and things that really get ahead of the issues, rather than always being behind and having to deal with the things that can become mundane or are less gratifying for them.

**Tim:** Okay. If we look at behind all of this, I think what we're saying is it's flavours of automation, be that a virtual agent, probably the top customer-facing end, through to the likes of RPA in the core. Where are you really seeing these having an impact?

**Kelly:** [What we're seeing](#) is there's a lot of opportunity in this space and some institutions have gone up and have been fairly proactive with implementing that and others are still thinking about that broader channel strategy that I mentioned earlier and how they're going to balance all of the channels.

And if I look at where AI is making an impact, we're definitely seeing it in cost reduction and being able to deflect contacts as well as enable the agents to become more effective. So that's a two-fold trend that is definitely in play in the market. And then there's the opportunity to increase customer experience, which is starting to pick up, as well.

**Tim:** And I totally agree with your point in and around call deflection, and also to the point of - I think, it's probably still in its infancy here - but if I look at some of the results we've achieved overseas, now we've been hitting upwards of in and around 90 percent call deflection of places where we've implemented either voice or tech solutions to pick up calls.

Now obviously they've targeted specific call types, but it's adding on an evolution of calls one after another, call types one after another, and just keep chipping away at that call base. And it's that evolution of the types of calls that we pick up... so start off with a simple build, build,



build, but the results that are being achieved at this point are pretty impressive.

**Kelly:** They are. [We're seeing](#) a three to four x increase in customer satisfaction with these transactions because they're one and done, and they're done quite quickly. You don't have to go through the whole process of authenticating yourself with an agent.

It's the virtual agent stepping in, realising all of your data is there and just basically getting the transaction done. So, that's not just cost out, that's actually an uplift in customer experience and CSAT as well.

**Tim:** And when we're looking at the three to four x improvement in CSAT through the speed of a response and having a simple interaction, I think the website is also the next target there. Because for me, personally, the website isn't the greatest experience I can have. Half the time I'm trying to find what I'm trying to do rather than just ask the question.

**Kelly:** Yeah. And that's why the increased uptake in NLP, or natural language processing, is so important. You can call into a contact centre, the technology can pick up what you're trying to do, you can say it in your normal words or the words of your neighbour, and it doesn't necessarily have to be everyone's best attempt to replicate how it might be organised on a website. And then you can get your transaction taken care of simply and easily.

**Tim:** Yeah, I think that's a really great point. I guess we're beyond the emergence of NLP now. It's mainstream, it's mature, and that is really what's behind an awful lot of our capabilities here.

**Kelly:** That's right. [We're seeing](#) a 40 percent reduction in average handling times, which plays into the cost reduction activity that we saw earlier. But it's really about that increase in being able to get things done simply and easily, both for the customer and for the agent.

**Tim:** And if we look internally, a thing we're now starting to see, the use of voice recognition and the natural language processing to be used on the auditing of calls.

**Tim:** And, you know, if you think historically, we all did, what, two, five percent of calls and it's a bit of a shot in the dark to see whether you're actually going to find something. We've started to see overseas auditing 100 percent of calls and training engines on "How do I find compliance issues? How do I find statements with legal complications?" And even, "Did the call end in a satisfactory manner?" I think there's huge opportunities there.

**Kelly:** As you said, we're seeing it now. It is possible to track 100 percent of calls and 100 percent of words, so that you can use that in a range of benefits to both the business, the agent and the customers.

So, from the business, you can obviously track compliance, and look for good behaviours and bad behaviours. From an agent's perspective, you can get out in front of trends before they're actually showing up in your lag indicators or your reports that you review at the end of the day. You can actually see those things happening in real time. Agents can deal with them while they're on the call and management can deal with them to maybe shift agents to a different type of queue or to get out in front and proactively contact customers.

**Tim:** I think that's a really, really good point, that I talked about auditing, but as soon as you've automated the solution to audit, you made that real time, and you're actually guiding the caller live on what they've said, how to change the call, what direction they need to take the call. This is pretty cutting-edge stuff, but it's real now.

**Kelly:** It is, and whether it's the angel or the devil sitting on the shoulder of the agent, that's tapping them and saying, "Hey, do something differently. You have an opportunity to improve." Or, "Please don't say that again." Those things can be happening real time.

And whether the call needs to be intervened from another channel or the agent needs to be encouraged to do more of what they're already doing, all those things are happening in the go.

**Tim:** The thing you pointed out, angels and devils, is really, really good. I look at the technology, I look at what's possible with the technology, so I look at the angel.

**Tim:** I know there's a human aspect to this. I



know there are people who've got experience doing their job. Nobody thinks they're doing a bad job. Everybody's doing what they can and doing the best that they can. But you act on what you know at that point in time. And I think there is clearly a training element and even a... I was going to say a maturing, but an acknowledgement or that we as people need to recognise that this technology can help us. A little bit confronting, I think, at the same time.

**Kelly:** Well, I think so. I think there's been a fear of what AI would do to the contact centre industry in general. And there's been lots of studies out there that say AI is going to be the contact centre killer. Well, in fact, it might actually be the reinvention of the industry and allow it to take the customer experience and the employee experience to new levels. Being a complement and being a creative to the experience and not necessarily taking away from anything.

**Tim:** Yeah, so a contact centre killer. [So, there's a quote in the AFR from the ninth of April.](#) "Call centres will be killed by bots but humans will still thrive." I get what they're saying. I don't think the contact centre will be killed.

**Kelly:** No, I think it will be evolved. I think it will allow agents to focus on deeper interactions, more important interactions. It will allow businesses to use the channel as something that helps growth and helps promote loyalty in a way that the customers can feel like "If I contact the contact centre," which we know 20 percent of Australians still do today on a monthly basis, "I'm going to get value add. It's not going to be a grudge interaction."

**Tim:** Yeah, no, absolutely. And I mentioned the technology. Just diving a little bit into the tech to a certain extent, and one of the challenges I'm seeing with organisations at the minute, because this is such a growing area, there's so much technology out there, at this point. And knowing who to pick, what technology should you use - it's not actually a very straightforward decision.

And I think within our organisation, we've looked at "Well, how can I abstract the technology away from the outcome?" Because what technology you use this month might not be the one they're using three to six months'

time. And that's a challenge that organisations are having to work through. But at the same time, with the evolution, especially around things like API technology, we can actually almost remove those technology concerns and focus on the outcome.

**Kelly:** I think that's right. I think in the beginning, the switch of technology was one of cost reduction and how can I move things to the Cloud, how I get more out of my tech stack, and how can I have a more integrated experience across all of my channels?

So, the technology is there today that definitely allows that to happen, and we at Accenture are certainly in the centre of that for a range of customers and organisations in terms of what they do.

The opportunity now is to say, "How can I take my organisation on a journey of looking across the different channels and how the contact centre technology complements the rest of what I need to do from an analytics and insights perspective. How can I get more flexibility? How can I put more ingenuity into that so that I can use it as a value add and not just lag indicators, in terms of how I report.

**Tim:** And are you looking at that from the perspective of the technology around things, like when we mentioned the NLP, and having tracked what happened on a call to understand what you should do next, regarding that call? Or are you looking at it more from an audit perspective? How are you seeing that unfold?

**Kelly:** Well, it's a quite broad question because if you look at all of the range of technologies that it really takes to build up a contact centre and channel strategy, there's a range of things, starting with your CRM (Customer Relationship Management). Is your CRM doing what you need to do? And as most of these solutions in market today, there's components of CRM, so you really have to look at all that and say, "Is that meeting your needs?" You're then looking at your analytics on your insights platforms. And whether that's speech analytics or down through reporting engines and the people that use that in the customer analytics space later on, are your analytics functions up to par? You've got your communications platforms, your messaging and unified communications. How are you breaking off, for example, your email traffic, your social



traffic, and your voice traffic, as well as your digital traffic? And putting that all together so that you've got a more combined view of everything that's happening? Then you've got your workforce management and your fraud systems.

So, there's really no limit to how we can cut this question around technology. It's "What are you trying to solve for, what is your vision and your strategy in terms of how all the channels are going to come together to tie back to your brand, and what you're trying to accomplish in the market?"

**Tim:** You mentioned a pretty wide array of challenges, opportunities - you know, things to be solved for. It sounds big and complicated. How do we then pull that down to, "Here's a problem I can solve and here's how we get started."

**Kelly:** So it's going to sound pretty basic, but it starts with assessment. And that's what we do, is we come in pretty quickly. We look at what you've got today. We look at what's working, what's not working, and how we can most quickly evolve that and whether... sometimes it's just as simple as instituting some AI or some bots into the situation. And in more complicated situations, it's saying "How do we look to modernise the tech stack to get to all of those good outcomes that we were referring to earlier?"

**Tim:** One of the places I go after it straight away is the emails. Because it's a relatively safe environment for you to take on. There isn't a direct interaction, an immediate interaction, with the customer. You've got time to process that email, consider what the response is, and send it back. And then decide how quickly you want that response to go. And it gives you a bit of time to learn the technology, understand how NLP operates and how to get the best out of it, before you really start hitting the customer almost face to face. To me, that's where I'd start. I think it's a relatively safe place to get off the ground.

**Kelly:** It is a good place to start. It's an easy way to instill some technology to help reduce the labour cost, as well as potentially improve the customer experience by getting back to the customer more quickly with an answer that's probably going to meet their needs.

**Tim:** And I think after that, I think for me, quite quickly target the research around, what are your call types, what's the call time? Then you can start to figure out "What's my business case? What am I actually going to save by deflecting these calls?" And in almost every case we've seen really, really strong business cases here.

**Kelly:** We have. As mentioned earlier it's not just about the cost out, it's also about the customer experience. Sometimes that's hard to measure but we found that it is very tangible, and we can tie some numbers to it quite quickly.

**Tim:** Okay. I think we're starting to run out of time now. It's a really, really interesting topic and I think we're going to see an awful lot of growth here over the next three, five years.

**Kelly:** It's an area that we're really passionate about. It's got so much opportunity, both to improve the customer experience and reduce cost. It's been a pleasure to work with you in this space and look forward to more of it.

**Tim:** It's been great conversation, and I'll look to speak to you again sometime.

**Kelly:** Sounds great, Tim. Thanks.

**Tim:** Thanks. Bye bye. If you have any questions about today's podcast, and want to get in touch with me, please email [tim.broome@accenture.com](mailto:tim.broome@accenture.com). For information on all our podcasts, please visit [accenture.com/embracingtech](http://accenture.com/embracingtech). See you next time.

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