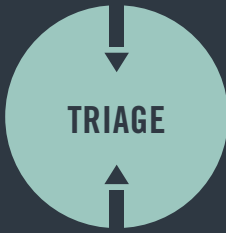# ANSWERIQ SUPPORT ENABLES 100% AUTOMATED TICKET CLASSIFICATION AND 50% TIME-TO-RESPONSE REDUCTION FOR
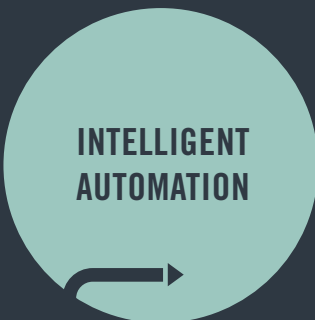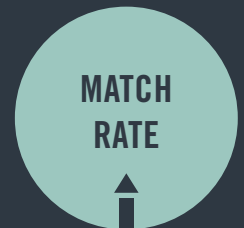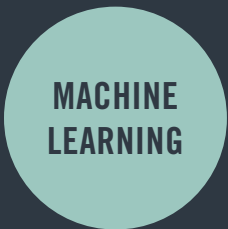
THRED UP

TRIAGE

SMART CLASSIFICATION

THRED^UP

ThredUP is an eCommerce shop selling secondhand women's and children's clothing to a wide range of customers. Much like a traditional consignment store, people sell ThredUp their new and gently used clothing, shoes, and accessories. Then, ThredUP resells them online, allow-ing customers to filter their search results by size, color, and price. ThredUP encour-ages customers to contact the support team when any questions arise, and excellent customer service is a top priority.

MACHINE LEARNING

MATCH RATE

AGENT SATISFACTION

INTELLIGENT AUTOMATION

RECOMMENDED RESPONSE

AnswerIQ
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THE CHALLENGE:
AUTOMATE TICKET CLASSIFICATION WITH PRECISION FOR EFFECTIVE ROUTING AND REPORTING

As ThredUP grew as a business, their support team began searching for a way to reduce the manual, tedious classification work of getting tickets to the proper agent in less time. At the same time, they recognized a need to improve their reporting.

"We wanted to deal specifically with internal classification of tickets," said VP of Customer Satisfaction, Chris Harvey. "We needed to make sure we got them to the right agent quickly, and that our reporting was sufficient enough to where we could then feed information back into the organization so that we could get better — in other words, fix that which isn't working and applaud that which is."

Among his most important goals was finding a better way to deal with the tedious manual classification process. Before engaging with AnswerIQ, ThredUP had been using its most senior agents to manually classify up to 1,200 tickets a day. This involved looking at the tickets, classifying them, and putting them in certain buckets for the proper agents to respond to.
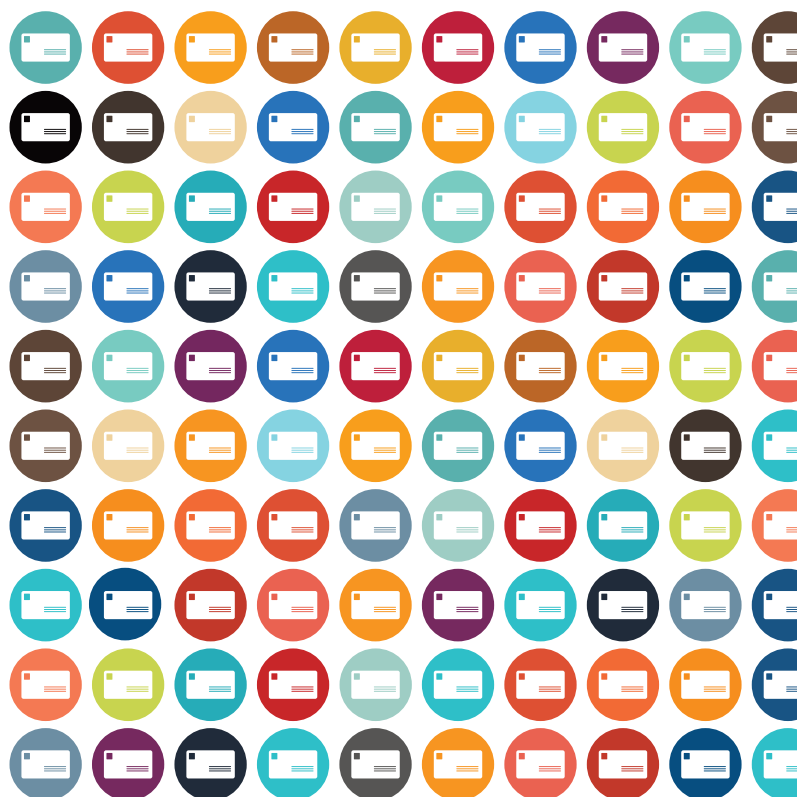
"We needed all the tickets to be classified and put in a semblance of order," Harvey said. "Our most senior people were classifying tickets because they knew [our system] best," Harvey said.

Part of the complexity was that ThredUP uses over 100 different case classifications, spanning across the entire customer experience. "The need within our organi-zation, in terms of the granularity of the data, is strong," Harvey explained. "We need to be as precise as we can when reporting incidents and trends. As a result, it takes a lot of skill to classify these things properly."

Harvey realized that, while he needed his best people to reliably classify tickets, they were kept from doing other high-level tasks because they were so bogged down by manual classification. Harvey emphasized "the need to do this in a more automated fashion" so that he could move his senior people away from having to classify tickets and focus on more important customer-facing issues. He decided to investigate the AnswerIQ triage solutions.

THE SOLUTION:
IMPLEMENT ANSWERIQ TRIAGE APPLICATION

ZENDESK API

AnswerIQ TRIAGE APPLICATION

As soon as Harvey made contact with the experts at AnswerIQ, he immediately appreciated the honest and straightforward way they worked with him, and the way they set clear expectations early on in the process. "They didn't oversell it," Harvey said. "They told us what the match rates would be, and the time to triage, and everything else. Given the size of the company, they're really responsive."

Harvey refers to the AnswerIQ Triage Application implementation as low impact. "You look at some of these other software vendors, with all these big project plans," Harvey says. "But [AnswerIQ] literally almost dropped in. It was a really low impact implementation." ThredUP gave AnswerIQ an API key and permission to download tens of thousands of closed tickets dating back to the beginning of 2016. Then, the AnswerIQ application automatically performed an initial configuration.

"They showed me graphs and data findings from their processes, and made a recommendation as far as which ones we should turn on first, and which we should wait on," Harvey said. He went on to describe the implementation process, which began in passive mode to test out configurations and minimize risk. "The way that we implemented it was very minimal risk, rather than jumping in and hoping they're doing the right thing," Harvey continued. "They simply tagged the tickets so that we could then let it bake a little bit early on, to see if it was actually working right."

AnswerIQ didn't get it completely correct right off the bat. In true machine learning fashion, it continues to learn and improve with every new problem. "We were able to stick our toes in the water and move slowly. Once we felt comfortable, we were able to write triggers, so that when each individual classification matured to where it got a high match rate, we would turn it into production. Now, we're at a point where nobody even thinks about classifying tickets."

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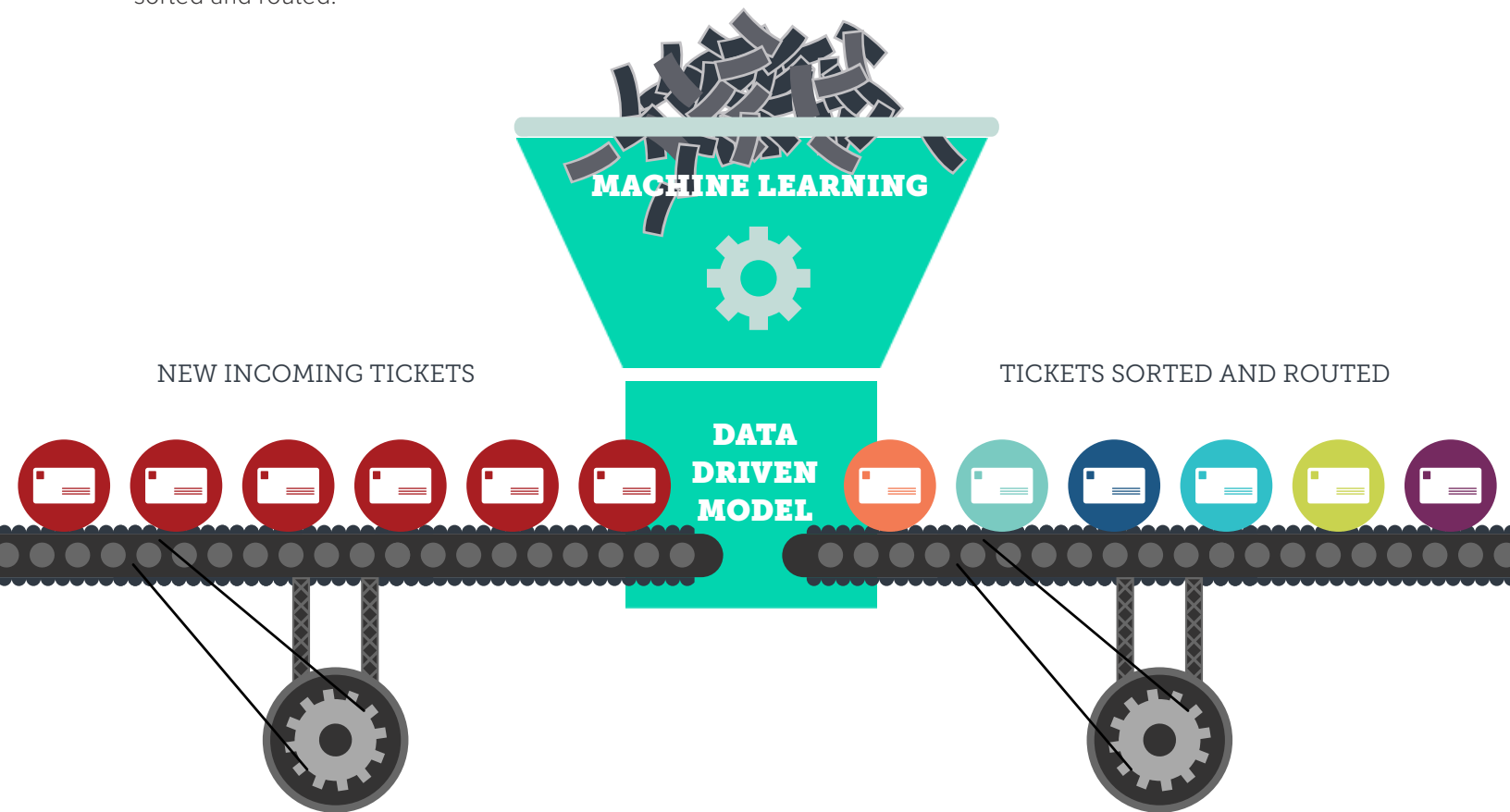# ANSWERIQ SUPPORT DELIVERS INTELLIGENT CLASSIFICATION

A key component of AnsweriQ Support includes intelligent classification, a branch of machine learning that classifies and prioritizes incoming customer service tickets with minimal to no human involvement.

AnsweriQ Support uses machine learning to identify how past tickets have been classified and routed, learning from the patterns and past actions of human service agents. Then, it uses that information to create a data-driven model that automatically classifies new incoming tickets. As new support tickets arrive, AnsweriQ Support examines the content and classifies all the attributes by mimicking the human service agents' actions and logic. In no time, the tickets are sorted and routed.

As a result, agents spend less time deciding how to classify tickets and what to tackle first — and instead spend more time solving problems and interacting with customers. By allowing agents to do what they do best, customer satisfaction improves significantly, with much faster response times and more accurate answers overall.

Furthermore, the machine learning tools evolve and adapt as internal processes change. That means that whenever there's a new product release, contact form update, or staff turnover, AnsweriQ Support observes the new behavior and and refines its automat-ed classifications for new tickets.

Harvey said that working with AnsweriQ has been more like an academic exercise than a business relationship. "It's a cliche, but it's been a real partnership. It's not sell sell sell, but 'this is an interesting problem and let's figure it out together.'"

MACHINE LEARNING

NEW INCOMING TICKETS

DATA DRIVEN MODEL

TICKETS SORTED AND ROUTED

THE RESULTS:

100% AUTOMATION, 80% MATCH-RATE, IMPROVED CONSISTENCY, AND BETTER CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Another important aspect of working with AnswerIQ was the ability for Harvey to monitor the process, to ensure things were working as they should. "We have regular meetings to make sure I'm keeping an eye on it, but there's really no need. It works without me. As long as the tools are there to monitor and make sure we can see what's working and what isn't, then I'm not at all skeptical"

AGENT SATISFACTION

Before working with AnswerIQ, ThredUP's agents were classifying 1,200 tickets a day. AnswerIQ is now tagging 100% of tickets. Furthermore, Harvey was able to move his senior agents away from the tedious manual classification work and assign them more impactful work interacting with customers and solving more complex issues.

"No one likes classifying tickets," Harvey said. "Although it's an important task, it's a really tedious task that no one really wants to do. Now, we can allow our people to go on to more interesting and customer-centric things."

Harvey is pleased that the machine learning applications are, in fact, learning and improving. "In the past, with humans, if someone fixed an incorrect classification, the person who did it in first place would never know it. You felt like you were paddling in a circle. Now, we can make the process better and better."

MATCH RATE

To measure the results, ThredUP looked at the match rate, or the tendency for AnswerIQ classification recommendations to match how the agent classified the ticket at ticket closure. "Our match rate is the most important thing we look after," Harvey said.

While the match rate isn't perfect every time, the application is becoming more accurate over time. "The good news is, every time we make a change to a classification, the AnswerIQ application learns. And like my kids, it doesn't make the same mistake twice. When you improve the behavior, or make the change to the classification, AnswerIQ learns from it and doesn't do it again. That's the basis of machine learning."

AnswerIQ Chief Technology Officer Prashant Luthra agrees, and explains how AnswerIQ applications learn over time. "Our applications are constantly learning from every ticket and every agent action. Thus, we automatically acquire more knowledge about the nuances and subtleties of our clients' triage processes, enabling us to reach higher and higher levels of accuracy as time goes on."

We're now auto-tagging 100% of our tickets with AnswerIQ, and the match rate is 80%. Now we're at a point where we don't worry about classifying tickets, because it happens automatical-ly. We still get some that aren't right, but we did that as humans, too."

IMPROVED CONSISTENCY

A big part of the results had to do with improved consistency across ThredUp's customer service team. Since the AnswerIQ applications learn from past human activity, they help improve the team's consistency with better responses over time.

"We had five different people classifying tickets," Harvey said. "So, as a test, I took 10 random tickets and had each agent classify them. Some of them they were all spot on, but there were a few of them where we had five different answers. The point is that, even when you have humans who know what they're doing, you're still not going to get perfect consistency."

Since implementing AnswerIQ, Harvey has seen similar or better consistency within the single tool than among his five separate support agents. "AnswerIQ has given us great consistency," he said.

Thanks to AnswerIQ helping ThredUp to deliver automatic responses to certain inquiries, a ticket typically will get- classified within two minutes, and customers will receive a response within about five hours.

CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

When it comes to customer perception, ThredUp's customers are see-ing vastly improved response times with far more accurate information.

ThredUP previously had a goal of a six-hour response time for any ticket that entered their system, but the actual response time had been hovering around 10-12 hours.

What's more, the customer experience during the buying process has improved. "We want to get more of our people involved with customers as they make their buying decisions to help them find and understand what we do and answer their questions rather than answering things like 'how do I return an order.' We don't need a seasoned, talented person to do that," Harvey said. "What we want to do is take the human resources we have and put them into higher value programs," he said. "We want to get more involved with customers as they are making their buying decisions."

Now that the agents are spending less time on triage, they can spend more time on activities like chat. When customers engage in chat sessions, ThredUP sees up to a three times higher conversion rate. Harvey chalks this up to higher-quality customer interactions and notes that the one-on-one relationships contribute to higher customer satisfaction.

"We're just building relationships," he said. "If [customers] buy, great. We want to make sure people feel comfortable and enjoy the experience." Harvey's perspective supports the idea that augmentation — the human-assisted machine learning process that guides people toward better answers, faster — helps to steer a company toward automating what they can without losing control of the customer experience.

To Harvey, it was essential to introduce automation tools while continuing to govern authentic agent-customer interaction. "No sense of automation can do that right now. That's where we want to put our people. We want to take advantage of automation however we can. AnswerIQ Support tools can help us with that."

LOOKING AHEAD

Since implementing AnswerIQ Triage, ThredUP has considered AnswerIQ Response as another tool within Zendesk. "As a ticket comes in, on the righthand side of the field there's a widget that says 'here's what we think the answer should be,'" Harvey explains. "You click, it populates, and then you can modify it. It will be a huge training tool and advantage for new agents. It also goes back to consistency and accuracy that we need in responding to customers."

The agents at ThredUP pride themselves on their personalized responses, and AnswerIQ recommended responses are a natural next step. "In the old days, 'macro' was a bad word," Harvey says.
"Now, you can use a macro as basis of response, then inject your per-sonality in and around response. You can inject it on top of a macro, which is the right response, and we need to give the right answer every time. With AnswerIQ Recommended Response, we're expecting an increase in agent productivity."

All in all, AnswerIQ was able to help ThredUP move their senior agents into more important customer-facing roles, leaving the more tedious tasks to the machines. The results keep improving, with more accurate match rates and reductions in overall response times that keep both customers and agents satisfied.

"In the past, we spent a ton of time on classification, and we had to run all kinds of reports and monitor all kinds of things to make sure we were doing it right," Harvey said. "Machine learning for this kind of process just makes a ton of sense. It's really the only way to go."

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