

KLM builds booking and packing bot 'BB' with Dialogflow

Founded in 1919, Amsterdam-based KLM Royal Dutch Airlines is the oldest global airline still flying under its original name. They serve 30+ million passengers annually, operate 200+ aircraft, and fly to 163 destinations worldwide. They're also the third-largest private employer in the Netherlands.

The average customer flies with KLM 1.4 times per year, and might not take time to download the airline's mobile app to book a flight. For that customer, the airline wanted "a new entry point"—one that provided opportunities for conversational interactions using voice or text. "A conversational experience allows for that personal approach. It brings warmth and personality to conversations with our customers," says Ruben Klerks, KLM social media manager.

"For us, social media includes all messaging channels and assistive platforms like the Google Assistant," says Martine van der Lee, KLM director of social media. Klerks adds, "We believe KLM should go to the customer, and be where they are."

Approach

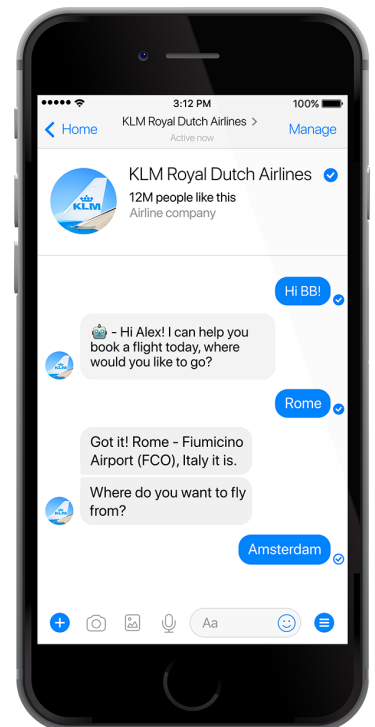
KLM began exploring ways of providing a conversational experience for customers in 2016. The airline chose Dialogflow after testing several platforms. "We really love Dialogflow," van der Lee says. "It has really strong natural language understanding (NLU) capabilities, which meant we were able to automate a large part of the conversation. And Dialogflow was very easy for our developers to use. We were able to build and ship the experience really quickly."

The airline's first project was a booking bot for Facebook Messenger, which they introduced in September 2017. KLM dubbed it 'BB,' for Blue Bot (blue being their signature color). BB's personality is female, helpful, friendly, and professional. She's also a bit edgy, and occasionally even cracks a joke. "If you want to make a booking through Messenger, BB will ask you for your destination, when you want to fly, etc.," van der Lee explains. "We'll show you the options, and you can purchase, fill out your personal details, and get your booking confirmation, all right there on the conversational app." By connecting BB with KLM's CRM system, a human agent can easily take over if she is unable to answer.

A few months later, KLM created another new way for customers to interact with BB. The airline launched a packing service for the Google Assistant in December 2017. "BB will guide you through everything you need to bring to your destination and for the length of your trip," van der Lee says. "She asks all the right questions—such as if you need to arrange for a visa, or if you need to bring medicine—so travelers are prepared for their trip. Based on the weather forecast, she will check if you need to bring extra clothes or an umbrella."

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Director, Social Media, KLM



The airline developed BB largely in-house within a few months, a cross-functional effort that involved members from marketing, IT, communications, copywriting, UX, engineering, and more. It also onboarded a digital agency to create the packing experience.

Results

KLM is pleased with BB's strong early performance. They've also learned that customers love chatting with BB just to discover fun easter-egg responses to all kinds of questions.

The airline plans to merge the booking and packing experiences, so travelers can easily tackle the logistics of trip planning and focus on their vacation itineraries. They'll also continue to grow BB's capabilities. "Our goal is to help travelers throughout the entire customer journey," Klerks says. "We really see BB as an extension of the KLM service family."

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*Example conversation:
Getting packing tips from BB*

I've just checked the weather in Dublin and there's a chance of rain. Make sure to pack a raincoat.

Will do

Good. You're ready for anything. If you want to bring a hat, this is the moment to put it in your bag.

Yes!

I was hoping you'd bring your hat. I always think it makes you look classy.