

Transcript

[00:00] Warren Whitlock: Welcome to another edition of Distributed Conversations. Today we're talking about the future of CRM and relationship management. Is AI going to eliminate all this, or are we going to need people more or less? Today I've got the expert on such things, a friend for many years, John Ferrara of Nimble.

[00:44] Jon Ferrara: First off, thank you for your friendship all these years. I think you bring joy to people's lives because you just love relationships and people, and we share that in common. I hope that in our conversation, this brief period of time, we could leave people with something that blows a little wind in their sails because I think we all grow by helping other people grow.

[01:17] Warren Whitlock: I know we were briefly talking about contact centers and how that's changing. I don't want to call and wait on hold and talk to somebody reading a script when I can look up the information myself, even more so now that I've got AI...

[01:57] Warren Whitlock: So even though you put in nimble.com, it's going to tell me something about Nimble rather than sending me right off to the website. Using my Nimble app is one of those things that I know I need to skip the search, but most of the time I find I want to know more about the world.

[02:28] Warren Whitlock: I was reading a book yesterday and I turned on an audio ChatGPT and I was asking questions every other paragraph. Boy, I love generative AI. I know that's just the surface of what it is, but if I can get along so well with the bots of today, knowing that they're only going to get better, what's in it for the future? Are we going to need people and relationships in business?

[03:03] Jon Ferrara: Well, as our good friend Brian Kramer often says, "The more digital we get, the more human we need to be." I chose this profession many decades ago, but I don't think computers will ever take away what you and I are doing right now. There is an energy flow and interaction that happens when two human beings connect and share commonalities.

[03:38] Jon Ferrara: I call it the five Fs of Life: family, friend, food, fun, and fellowship. In the old days, I taught people when they go into somebody's office, look at the walls, look at the books they read, the degree of the school they went to, the knickknacks they collect. All these things are clues for you if you're present enough to learn about that person.

[04:07] Jon Ferrara: That's really what relationships are all about—building a common connection and finding ways to blow wind in another human being's sails. I don't think AI really does that for you as much as a human being does, even when you do it digitally.

[04:54] Warren Whitlock: [*Demonstrates ChatGPT interaction about John Ferrara*]

[05:33] Jon Ferrara: If you're going to go into another call or room with another human being, it's your job to get prepared. You need to know who that person is, what their business is about, where they are in a particular stage in life.

[06:07] Jon Ferrara: CRM stands for customer relationship management. It should stand for customer reporting management. There's 225 million people in businesses in the world. Most people see CRM as spreadsheets and Google contacts, Google email. Why? Because they're not really designed for the purpose they are, which is engaging at scale to help you achieve your dreams by helping other people achieve theirs.

[06:39] Warren Whitlock: We complained about how bad a lot of the salespeople were we had to deal with back in the 70s and 80s when I was learning this stuff. In the 90s, I thought I got pretty good at it.

[07:13] Warren Whitlock: I had drills, I had checks, I had audits to make sure people would record stuff. It was pretty simple—that one was good that it was indexed on phone numbers and we were doing this all by telephone back then.

[07:48] Warren Whitlock: AI now makes all that very instant, but what about the agents? Right now an AI can talk to an agent and maybe get a better experience than a lot of the people I talk to because they're not taking the time to be prepared.

[08:23] Jon Ferrara: I have engaged with AI bots, voice bots and text bots that have done a decent job of listening to me and providing me the answers that I want. My little brother Danny runs this hard money shop where he has all these dialers that dial and send text out.

[08:57] Jon Ferrara: The bot's smart enough to bring them back on track and guide them through the steps necessary to qualify them. It's possible for bots to emulate human processes, but I still feel that computers and AI are going to be there for facilitating high-end engagement as opposed to taking it over.

[09:45] Jon Ferrara: It takes 60% of the fuel to get into orbit, 60% of the energy of a car to get up to speed, 60% of the energy to establish the relationship, but it takes very little to keep it going—like a plate on a pencil.

[10:26] Jon Ferrara: You shouldn't be worried about whether or not AI is going to take your job. You should be worried about whether somebody who understands AI is taking your job because they're going to use AI and get a lot more productive.

[10:58] Warren Whitlock: I remember asking the professor what the heck is Goodwill, and they said well that's just a number that helps us balance the accounting.

[11:33] Warren Whitlock: Back then if you had somebody's name and mailing address, you had more than most of your competitors.

[12:09] Jon Ferrara: On the future of CRM - CRM started out as contact management with things like Gold and Maximizer. Contact management is the heart of CRM.

[12:51] Jon Ferrara: CRM got lost with contact management because Outlook came out. CRMs weren't about relationships anymore; they were about command and control, mainly for sales.

[13:26] Jon Ferrara: Today salespeople use CRMs, marketing people use email marketing systems, and bizdev and PR people use spreadsheets. It's got to change.

[14:02] Warren Whitlock: I called somebody and I got a hold of customer service and they decided it had to do with tech support. I've been on chat and I'd given all my information several times, and the person doesn't have it.

[14:40] Jon Ferrara: When you call American Express, they don't forget who you are. They know who spoke last time. That's an engagement system, a contact management system. The problem is there's too many systems in the typical sales and marketing stack and it's got to simplify.

[15:50] Warren Whitlock: I would get pages on my browser where I would see three and four step stool ads.

[17:10] Warren Whitlock: I spoke with Doc Searls about this one time, the Cluetrain Manifesto guy. He spoke about VRMs so that companies would want to keep track of their vendors.

[18:25] Jon Ferrara: You don't have to go buy ConvertKit or MailChimp or Active Campaign or HubSpot to add on the email, the chat, the text, the phone, the browser plugin that works in LinkedIn and all the different things that you need.

[19:42] Jon Ferrara: Nimble is the only company that ever had full access to LinkedIn public and private APIs, and we mapped into Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Instagram, Foursquare, Google+, Crunchbase, AngelList and tied all that together.

[21:17] Warren Whitlock: I've just talked to somebody who is a CPA and we're having him on a program as a CPA because what he knows about taxes. I asked for his Twitter handle and he came back with 'no, not that one.' He's eliminated his name from his Twitter handle because he's in the crypto business.

[22:24] Jon Ferrara: America is still a little step behind on WhatsApp, but there are APIs that allow you to do communications on that. In fact, the iPhone now allows you to swap out the phone for WhatsApp as a device.

[23:40] Warren Whitlock: If you put a URL in a contact record in Nimble, it will pull the company pertinence down including their SIC, employees, CEO name, address, phone number, emails, things like that.

[24:49] Warren Whitlock: ChatGPT, you can't tell it to go look at a page and analyze it and derive things from it.

[26:01] Warren Whitlock: Another thing I got from working with Robert Scoble is that my privacy is gone enough if you live a public life.

[27:00] Jon Ferrara: For all the people listening to this today, if you don't have your own personal Rolodex, your own personal CRM, you should go get one because life isn't about making money, it's about making memories out of moments with people you love like you, Warren.

[28:12] Warren Whitlock: I think about it - had I met you back in the days I was radio advertising or in college or something, we might not be friends now. I now reached the point that if I go find somebody I knew in my early 20s and they're in their late 60s, they might be retired.

Key Takeaways

- The importance of human relationships in an AI-driven world
- CRM systems need to return to focusing on relationships rather than just reporting
- Integration of communication channels is crucial for modern business relationships
- The value of preparation and research before any business interaction
- Personal CRM systems are essential for maintaining long-term relationships

This transcript has been lightly edited for clarity.

[End of Episode]