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MANTHAN'S MAYA: ASSISTING EXECUTIVE DECISION MAKING THROUGH VOICE ANALYTICS

(Atul Batra, Chief Technology Officer (CTO) of Manthan imitated the persona of a fictitious CEO, Bill Smith, who was at home making breakfast for his kids and wished to have a quick sense of how business was going)

Bill: Alexa, talk to Maya.

Maya: Good Morning. I am Maya from Manthan Retail Analytics – your virtual assistant. I can give you insights to power your business decisions. May I know who am I assisting today?

Bill: This is Bill.

Maya: Hi Bill Smith. How may I assist you today?

Bill: Alexa, ask Maya, what is my business update for today?

Maya: Hi Bill. The business update for January 16th is as follows – net sales stand at 884 thousand dollars; you have achieved 78 percent against the plan, up by 15 percent against last week with a gross margin of 23 percent up by 7 percent against last week.

On January 15-17, 2017, Manthan, advanced analytics and business intelligence company for retail and consumer packaged goods (CPG) showcased Maya and its Artificial Intelligence (AI)-powered decision-making abilities at booth #4111 of the NRF Convention and Expo at Jacob K. Javits Center, New York. Batra demonstrated Maya in the conference by engaging in business

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dialogues (with Maya). The demonstration looked promising and kick-started Maya's launch in the retail industry. The 30-member Manthan's AI R&D team of majors in Natural Language Processing (NLP), Machine Learning, and Mathematics and Statistics had utilized over \$7.5 million and spent 3 years to build the disruptive innovation, Maya¹. It was commended as the 'coolest innovation of the year' in the NRF, 2017 conference. Atul Jalan, Chief Executive Officer of Manthan, ascertained that Maya was the first and foremost virtual assistant in the world to be integrated with business information systems, and was virtually indistinguishable from magic. He envisaged Maya to lead the radical transformation of business operations to zero-touch user interfaces and voice-based interactions.

At this juncture, Batra had to ride the expectations of his CEO by marketing the product appropriately to all the C-suite positions (for example, chief executive officer, chief financial officer, chief operating officer, chief information officer and chief marketing officer). However, Batra was aware of the challenges ahead. He opined:

"Since we launched Maya, we have spoken to 10-15 top analysts in our industry globally, and they have acknowledged this as a unique product ... however when you have such disruptive technology, adoption is not a given. Now that we have opened a can of worms, the challenges are that people's expectations have skyrocketed. They reckon Maya to be able to answer any kind of questions. In order to meet such expectations, you have to deal with domain specific data and algorithms, but there is no one-size-fits-all approach."

Some of the fundamental questions that cluttered Batra's mind were as follows: How could Maya disrupt the technological arena? How could Manthan market such an innovation? Was the market ready for such an AI-induced product? If yes, which market segment and roles would be most responsive to Maya? How could he build awareness for such product and show value to the customers? Did Maya have the capability to cater to the legacy of innovativeness?

¹ Manthan's Maya can answer CEOs' questions within seconds, Business Line, The Hindu, January 30, 2017, <http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/info-tech/infotech/article9512568.ece>