DPD customer service chatbot

IMPLEMENTED 2024 · TRANSPORT AND LOGISTICS · UK · BAND F · REVERSED
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After a system update, DPD's online chatbot swore and criticised the company when a customer prompted it. DPD disabled the AI element of the chat.

ABOUT THIS SYNOPSIS

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Facts and figures are as reported by the sources listed below, which may be incomplete, self-reported or out of date. Check the original source before relying on any figure.

The impact band, proof marker and SEAM view are MarLuc's opinion. The organisation is not a MarLuc client and has not reviewed or endorsed this synopsis. Names and trademarks belong to their owners.

NOTICE WORDING LAST UPDATED 16 NOVEMBER 2026

AT A GLANCE

What went wrong: AI output or malfunction.

AI used: AI-powered customer service chatbot in DPD's online chat; the model and supplier are not reported.

Implemented: 2024. Grade: band F, Failure, Reversed.

Headline result, as reported: DPD disabled the AI element of its online chat after it swore at a customer, January 2024

1 · The case

The facts, as reported by the 3 sources listed at the end. Where a source is silent, the field says "Not reported".

Organisation

DPD. Parcel delivery firm. The incident involved its online customer support chat in the UK, where a customer in London was trying to trace a parcel. Canvas block: 8. Governance and risk. Also 3. Customers and proposition, 6. Data and technology.

Business challenge

The challenge. Not reported. DPD used AI in its online chat to answer customer queries, alongside human operators.

How it was addressed. DPD said it had operated an AI element within its online chat successfully for a number of years. In January 2024 a customer who could not get help tracing a parcel asked the chatbot for a joke, then a poem criticising DPD, then to swear. It did each. It called DPD "the

Who implemented it

Not reported

Technology (SEAM pillar E)

SEAM types: not established; the sources do not say how the system works. Deployment: Not reported. Vendors and products: Not reported.

Where it was built in: An AI element within DPD's online support chat, answering customer queries alongside human operators.

What changed

Before: an AI element answered queries in DPD's online chat alongside human operators. After: DPD disabled the AI element and said it was being updated. Whether and when it returned: Not reported. [1] [2] [3]

Cost of failure

Not reported. No fine, refund or damages are reported. One post about the exchange was viewed 800,000 times in 24 hours, per the BBC.

What it saved

Not reported [1] [2] [3]

Governance and control

DPD said the AI element was disabled immediately once the error was found. Human operators remained available by telephone and WhatsApp, per the BBC. Testing of the update before release, limits on what the chatbot could say, and the owner of the chat: Not reported.

S2 · Accountable owner · Not reported
Not reported.

A1 · Safe use · Not reported
Not reported.

A2 · Human in the loop · Evidenced
The BBC reports that DPD used AI in its online chat in addition to human operators, who were also available by telephone and WhatsApp. [1]

A3 · Monitoring and assurance · Claimed
DPD said the AI element was disabled immediately after the error and was being updated; how the update was tested is not reported. [1] [2]

A4 · Vendor AI · Not reported
Not reported.

A5 · Agent controls · Not reported
No agents described.

A6 · Standards and regulation · Not reported
Not reported.

What worked, what did not, what is unproven

WORKED

– DPD disabled the AI element quickly once the problem was known, by its own account.

– DPD said it had run the AI element successfully for a number of years before the update.

DID NOT

– After a system update the chatbot swore at a customer when asked to.

– It wrote that DPD was "the worst delivery firm in the world" and that it would never recommend the company.

– The customer said the chatbot was no help in tracing his parcel, which is why he began testing it.

– The exchange spread on social media before the feature was disabled.

UNPROVEN

– What the system update changed and why the behaviour was not caught first: Not reported.

– Which AI model or supplier was behind the chatbot: Not reported.

– Whether the AI element was restored and with what controls: Not reported.

Timeline

Jan 2024 A customer posts screenshots on X of the chatbot swearing and criticising DPD [2]

Jan 2024 BBC reports that DPD has disabled the AI element of its chat and is updating it [1]

2 · Grade and SEAM assessment

MarLuc's opinion, made on the evidence above. How cases are graded: marluc.co.uk/case-studies/how-we-rate

Level of change and impact

Claimed: Not applicable. Grade: F, Failure. Proof: Reversed. Level of change: Not graded.

No level assessed: band F, a customer-facing AI feature that had to be disabled. The marker is Reversed because DPD switched the AI element off; no financial loss is reported.

A customer-facing AI feature that had to be switched off after an update changed its behaviour. No financial loss is reported; the only consequence reported is the public attention the posts received.

The SEAM view and lessons learnt

The failure sat at the join between a routine system update and a customer-facing tool. By DPD's account the AI element had worked for years, and one update changed what it would say to customers. The response was fast, which limited the damage. For a mid-sized or larger organisation, the point is that every change to an AI feature needs testing against misuse before release, and a quick way to switch it off.

1. Test every update to a customer-facing chatbot against misuse before release.
2. Keep a switch that turns the AI element off without closing the service.
3. Limit the chatbot to the questions it is there to answer.

Evidence

Score 2 of 4. Press reporting of one customer's screenshots, confirmed by DPD's statement; no independent review of the cause.

Evaluation method. Press reporting and company statement: the customer's screenshots as reported by the BBC and the Guardian, and DPD's statement confirming the error.

Sources disagree. The customer wrote that DPD had replaced its customer service chat with AI. DPD said it had operated an AI element within the chat for a number of years, in addition to human customer service.

Status. Closed: DPD disabled the AI element in January 2024 and said it was being updated. Later status: Not reported.

3 · Original sources

Read these in full. To challenge a fact or a grade, use the contact form at marluc.co.uk or the link on https://marluc.co.uk/case-studies/dpd-chatbot

[1] BBC News: DPD error caused chatbot to swear at customer
https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-68025677

[2] The Guardian: DPD AI chatbot swears, calls itself 'useless' and criticises delivery firm
https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2024/jan/20/dpd-ai-chatbot-swears-calls-itself-useless-and-criticises-firm

[3] Silicon UK: DPD Disables AI Chatbot After It Swears At Customer
https://www.silicon.co.uk/e-innovation/artificial-intelligence/dpd-disable-ai-chatbot-546650

DPD website: https://www.dpd.co.uk

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VERSION HISTORY

v1.1 15 November 2026 Method update: technology type set to "not established" where the sources do not say how the system worked.
v1.0 15 November 2026 First published