

How IKEA's chatbot Billie took routine order questions off its call centers

Facts as of 2026-10-26

At a glance

Ingka, the largest IKEA retailer, handed customers' run-of-the-mill questions to a chatbot called Billie and trained its call-center staff to become design advisers, Reuters reported^[1]. A chatbot is a program that answers typed questions on its own, day or night, and should pass the customer to a person when it is stuck. By IKEA's own count, Billie took a large part of the routine questions typed to it and freed staff for design work. What it did not do, customers say, is get them to a person when it was stuck. And nobody outside IKEA has measured how much of the work it really took.

1. What they did with AI

Ingka rolled out Billie in its 2021 financial year^[2]. Ingka says the bot answers customers day and night and holds many conversations at once^[2]. IKEA UK's help page says it is best at order status, store hours, rescheduling deliveries and reporting missing or damaged items^[3]. Delivery complaints and help planning modular furniture go to a person, Fortune reported^[4]. Fortune also reported that the call-center workers whose jobs the bot partly took over were not laid off: IKEA retrained them for harder questions or for selling design advice remotely^[4]. By June 2023, Ingka said, that retraining had reached 8,500 people^[2]. What that new work came to is the next part of the story.

2. What the AI did

Ingka says that from 2021 to 2023 Billie resolved about 47% of the questions customers typed to it.^[2] By June 2023, Ingka said, that came to 3.2 million conversations solved by the bot and nearly 13 million euros saved.^[2] In July 2026, Ingka told Fortune the bot could assist 74% of the customers who used it, a newer figure with a looser word than "resolved".^[4]

On jobs, Ingka's people manager was asked in June 2023 whether more AI meant fewer staff, and said: "That's not what we're seeing right now."^[1] In 2026 Fortune reported that none of that spring's corporate layoffs were put down to AI.^[4] Parag Parekh, the chief digital officer, did not rule out future layoffs, but said they would likely come from the economy rather than from AI.^[4]

Richard Richardson, a Sheffield remote-sales worker, said he never feared being pushed out when Billie arrived.^[4] An analyst wrote that IKEA shows AI need not eat jobs.^[5]

Our view: the bot took over a big share of the simplest order and delivery chats, and IKEA put the freed hours into that new work. But every figure on the bot is IKEA's own, and it counts the chats the bot received, not the whole workload.

3. What it did not do

IKEA UK's contact page offers Billie around the clock, but live chat with a person only in office hours.^[6] After hours, part of IKEA's saving becomes the customer's wait.

On Trustpilot in October 2026, one reviewer wrote that the AI promised a human assistant who never came^[7], and a summary of 1,972 reviews on another site lists unresponsive chat bots.^[8] Another said the chatbot answers everything but the question.^[9]

Handed to a person, the thread is lost: one reviewer found no connection with previous chats and repeated everything.^[10] Richardson told Fortune the AI cannot yet tell what a customer was already offered.^[4]

A later Ingka report says it dropped its target to retrain co-workers, starting with customer service.^[11] Berliner Zeitung reported that staff at the closing Rostock service center suspect "KI-gestützten Bots", AI-driven bots, are behind it.^[12] IKEA cited an expiring lease.^[12] No link has been shown, and no later count of retrained staff exists.

What we don't know

- What share of all contacts, by phone, email and chat, Billie handles: the true measure of the staff work it took.
- How many customers who asked for a person reached one, how long they waited, and whether that person saw the chat.
- Whether the retrained staff moved into new roles, and how many stayed: the people side is what the story sells.
- What Billie cost to build and run, and so whether the saving is net of that bill.

4. What it means for any business

The piece that worked at IKEA is small enough to copy: a bot that answers the few questions your customers ask again and again, on your website and on WhatsApp. You can rent one ready-made. If your customers rarely repeat a question, you can skip it. The person who answers customers today should own it: they write the answers, choose the hours when a person takes over, and test it, which takes 1 to 10 days of their time.^[13] Renting a ready-made bot for both channels costs about \$216 to \$1,300 in the first

year,^[14] with WhatsApp's own message fees billed on top.^[15] This week, list last week's customer questions, mark the ones a bot could finish alone, and decide who answers when it cannot, and at what hours.

5. What we can learn from them

Give a bot a narrow job and let people keep the rest. Billie's results came from the simple, repetitive chats, not from trying to do everything.

A bot is only as good as its way out. Nearly every complaint about Billie was about reaching a person, so passing the conversation to staff, with what was already said, deserves as much care as the answers.

Before the bot goes live, decide what the people it frees will do. IKEA already had a place for them, so the time saved became income instead of a job cut.

Choose how you will measure the bot before launch, and count it against everything that reaches your business, not only what reaches the bot. Otherwise a success figure grows in the retelling, as IKEA's did.

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13. Our estimate: Someone's working time to get the bot answering customers correctly. Low is 1 day: the vendor says the bot itself is live in 10 minutes, and we add a day to write answers and test them. High is 10 days: the one independent account says onboarding took about 2 weeks, at 5 working days a week. Assumptions: The owner or one staff member does the work, not all days full time. The business already has a website or FAQ the bot can read. The one-day low is our own allowance, not a published figure. The 2-week account is one support team at a software company, so a small shop could be faster or slower.
14. Our estimate: First-year cost to rent a ready-made AI chat bot for the website and WhatsApp for a 5-person business. Low is the Chatfuel Business plan billed yearly, 216 (18 a month). High is 12 months of Wati Growth at 59 plus 12 months of Tidio Growth at 49.17, rounded up to 1300. Assumptions: Prices are in USD from the vendors' own pages and assume annual billing, which is cheaper than monthly. Meta's WhatsApp message fees are billed on top and are not in the range. Tidio's Growth price may not include every Lyro AI conversation needed, so the high figure is a cap on plan fees only. No local MXN or CAD prices were found; convert at the day's rate. Built from sources [15].
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