



AI-powered virtual agent network helps entrepreneurs set up business



OPPORTUNITY

With a bold vision of a human-centric society, ready to respond to the challenges of today and tomorrow, the Finnish government joined the global race to attract the world's most forward-thinking talent.

Finland boasts a wide range of free-of-charge, state-supported public services. With a dropping birthrate and a shrinking workforce, the country's tax revenues may not be enough to sustain these public services. So, to fill this gap and encourage economic growth, the Finnish government joined the global race to become the next top-talent hub for the world's most forward-thinking new businesses.

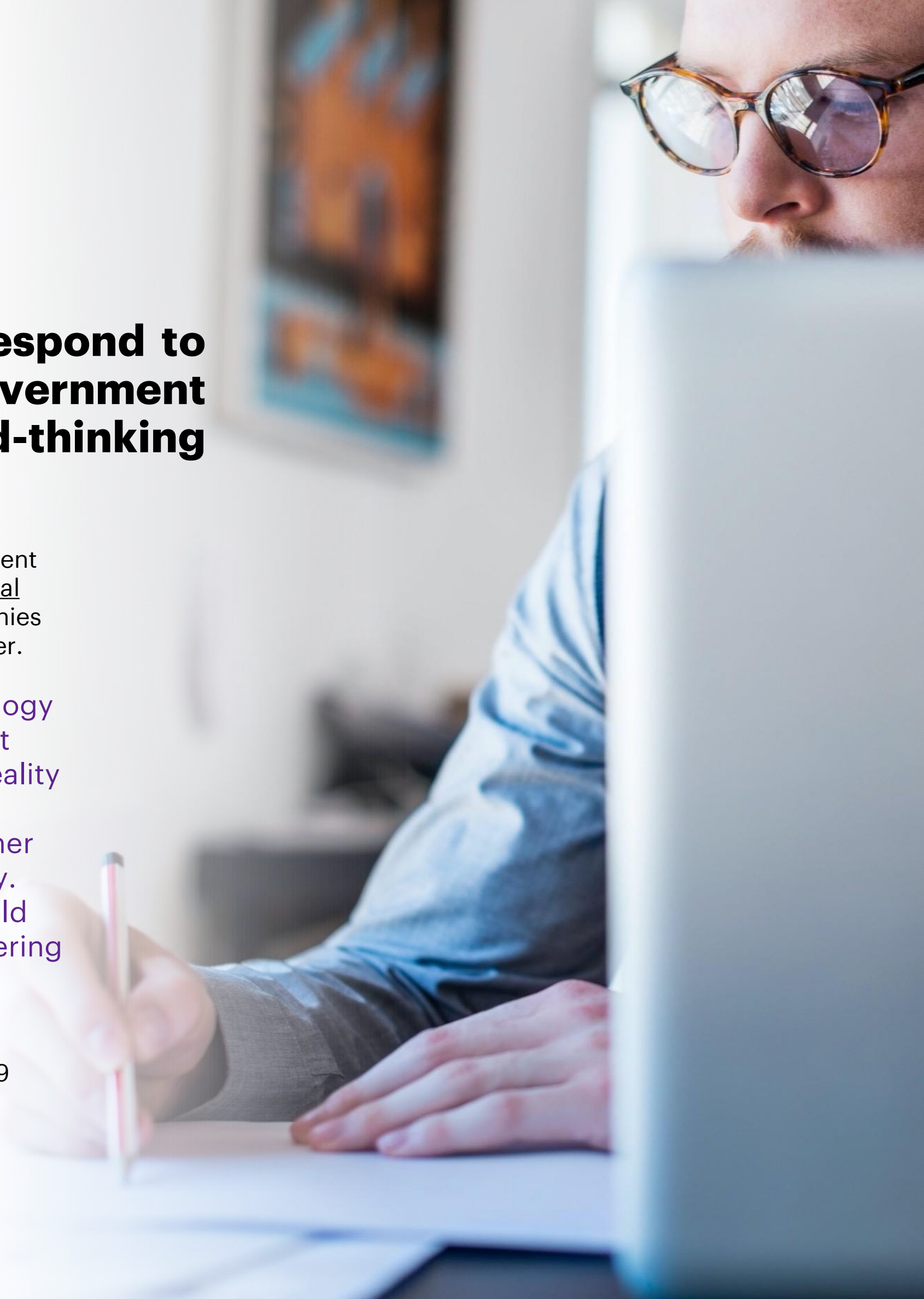
The Finnish government understood that entrepreneurs appreciate high-quality experiences free of stress: seamless, one-click services, rather than the typical bureaucratic processes of government agencies. And when bringing business to Finland, there are several disparate issues to consider: How do you register a business? What are the work permit requirements? How do you ensure the right taxes are paid?

Historically, finding answers to these questions involved approaching multiple government agencies, which led to a lengthy and fragmented process, especially if the customer didn't speak Finnish. So using Artificial Intelligence (AI) to create models

that can drive forward one of the best public administrations in the world, the Finnish Government wanted a solution that aligned to its [Aurora national AI program](#), designed to help citizens and companies alike utilize services in a timely, sustainable manner.

Their goal was to leverage new technology to unite a wider network of government agencies. But turning this vision into reality would require an ecosystem of agency collaboration, innovation, deep customer understanding and intuitive technology. More importantly, public agencies would need to be more proactive about delivering human-centered services.

These kinds of services have proven to be even more relevant in a world upended by the COVID-19 pandemic, where people expect innovative government services to help them navigate disruptive new norms.



COLLABORATION IN ACTION

The Finnish Immigration Service (Migri) first tapped Accenture to co-create a design and innovation lab, known as Inland Design, to promote organizational change through data analysis, design thinking and advanced technology. The concept for connected virtual assistants quickly emerged.

As the ecosystem orchestrator, Accenture brought in boost.ai, a Norwegian start-up that works on multilingual and scalable AI, to co-build the foundational platform for the AI-connected services. In just three months, the collaborative effort created one of the world's first known AI-driven Virtual Agent Networks (VAN) – a group of AI-enabled virtual assistants that can communicate, providing a much more seamless and unified service for citizens.

With VAN and a vision, Migri, the Finnish Tax Administration and the Finnish Patent and Registration Office joined forces to start solving societal challenges by encouraging top talent to move to Finland. The network was called “Starting up Smoothly.”

Implementation depended on joint commitment by agencies, Inland's design effort and partners, such as Accenture and boost.ai, that could bring together the right knowledge, solution and skills set.



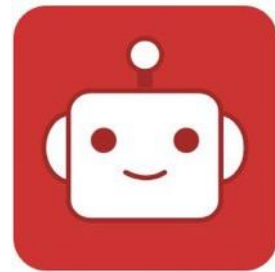
COLLABORATION IN ACTION

Starting Up Smoothly was designed to give users an easy entry point to interact with the Virtual Agent Network:

The service consists of three virtual assistants:

KAMU (IMMIGRATION)

Helps with immigration and citizenship issues



PATREK (PATENT AND REGISTRATION OFFICE)

Supports questions related to setting up a business in Finland



VEROBOT (TAX)

Answers tax-related queries



These virtual assistants are powerful on their own. But together they offer a single, seamless experience to the end-user – one network to answer their business-related questions. The accessibility of this knowledge eases the burdens on those looking for information – and not just foreign nationals.

The opportunities for connecting services are endless and would bring huge benefits to users. It's a true example of a "Living Service" – a virtual network that brings together organizations across sectors to serve citizens and business alike with a holistic, proactive and human-centered approach.



PEOPLE AND CULTURE

In the true spirit of public service, Finland cares about the citizens it serves and wants to ensure they have the right tools to thrive.

Starting up Smoothly sets the bar for how digital services should function. Instead of figuring out who to contact and then making multiple calls to different agencies, customers now have a single place to get their questions answered – anytime, anywhere.

Customers can access all three virtual assistants through a single chat window that synchronizes to the Migri, Tax Administration and Patent and Registration Office websites. For foreign entrepreneurs searching for information, the service is also available on the purpose-built site, startingupsmoothly.fi.

The virtual assistants not only understand different languages, the AI network is able to recognize the topic of each question and immediately connect the user with the right organization to answer the question. For example, if you ask Kamu a question about taxation, VeroBot recognizes the topic and can immediately respond. The individual agencies do not need to break down departmental boundaries to share data – instead, the network directly connects the customer and the right agency. So, regardless of where customers begin an online chat, the right agency is available to answer their questions immediately without having to switch sites or chat windows.

PEOPLE AND CULTURE

The idea for AI-driven services that connect different entities may have been born in the Accenture Innovation Hub, but to succeed, collaboration was key. By combining Accenture's innovation architecture with the technology capabilities of boost.ai and the agencies' deep customer knowledge, an ecosystem focused on providing better customer experiences and engagement became a reality.

A previously complex process is now a "Living Service" that offers customers a more responsive, relevant and less daunting start to business operations in Finland.

Public service employees also benefit from this AI-driven service. Now that virtual assistants can answer frequently asked questions, anticipate needs and automate routine tasks, employees have more time to strengthen their service skills and focus on more complex cases that need human support.



VALUE DELIVERED

Starting up Smoothly has helped these agencies rethink their customer service to become more human-centered - available at any time.

The network has not only built AI capabilities inside these three organizations but has assisted them in defining new ways to engage in cross-government collaboration.

The solution has played a role in Migri's virtual assistant Kamu having more than 100,000 customer conversations a year. It also helped the agency win the award for Best Choice in Digital Service 2020 in BearingPoint's recent research, with the Tax Administration placing fourth in the same category. The Tax Administration has been able to develop their own customer-centric capabilities by providing digital customer service through AI to pursue their goal of making taxation simple for businesses and citizens, keeping the customer needs in the centre. The Patent and Registration Office, for its part, has developed its customer service with AI, focusing even stronger to the needs of customers with foreign backgrounds.

The courage and open-mindedness of these three agencies: Migri, the Tax Administration and the Patent and Registration Office, engaging in groundbreaking cross-sectoral collaboration not only sets an example for other government agencies to follow, but shows the world that the Finnish government is a trustworthy and forward-thinking counterpart.

The adaptability of this Virtual Agent Network to other areas of government is promising, given the speed of service and the low cost to scale. It represents a significant step towards "Finland as a service," a truly living government that empowers public agencies to deliver relevant, connected and adaptable experiences that build trust between governments and citizens.

