

[RE]IMAGINE EDUCATION

A weekly Design AI newsletter



ASKESD: HOW SUTD'S AI CHATBOT TRANSFORMED VISITOR ENGAGEMENT AT OPEN HOUSE 2025

Mr. Ang Chee Kiat, ESD

In Conversation with Dr. Nachamma Sockalingam, OSP

What happens when AI meets student outreach?



Ang Chee Kiat
Specialist, Lab Support
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At the 2025 SUTD Open House, the Engineering Systems and Design (ESD) pillar put this question to the test.

By launching AskESD, a chatbot powered by EdCafe.AI, the team explored how generative AI could reimagine booth interactions.

Visitors received real-time answers to questions about ESD courses, careers, and specialisations. It was a low-barrier, high-impact way to engage tech-savvy prospective students. Even more importantly, it gave the ESD team insight into what visitors want to know and how to answer better. Though still in its pilot phase, AskESD offered a glimpse into the future of smart outreach.

ESD is working on more of such projects. Do connect with us if you would like to work on such projects.

This newsletter is produced with ChatGPT and other AI tools as super-collaborators. The authors contribute the core ideas, drafts, strategic framing, pedagogical insights, and design direction, while AI supports by refining, formatting, and creative articulation. (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0).

Editor of Newsletter:

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AskESD

Virtual Assistant



Hi Chee Kiat, I learnt that ESD booth had an innovative chatbot during the SUTD open house this year. Could you tell us more about that.

That's right! For the first time, we piloted an interactive chatbot experience using EdCafe.AI. We called it AskESD, and it was designed to help visitors better understand the Engineering Systems and Design (ESD) undergraduate programme.

Visitors could ask natural-language questions, just like asking a real person. Questions like "What kind of jobs can I get with an ESD degree?" or "How is ESD different from the other SUTD pillars?" The chatbot gave personalised responses and even linked students' interests—like data science or finance—to specific ESD courses such as Data and Business Analytics or Investment Science.

That sounds super helpful! Did it change how you interacted with visitors?

Absolutely. It allowed us to better manage booth traffic. Visitors could explore answers on their own, especially if they were shy or waiting for staff. Plus, it let us showcase how AI tools are already part of the ESD ecosystem.

Any surprises from the pilot?

While it answered anticipated questions well, we noticed low overall usage as only a handful participants used it. I think people generally may prefer human-human interaction since they are already on campus. Still, it gave us valuable data on what people are curious about.

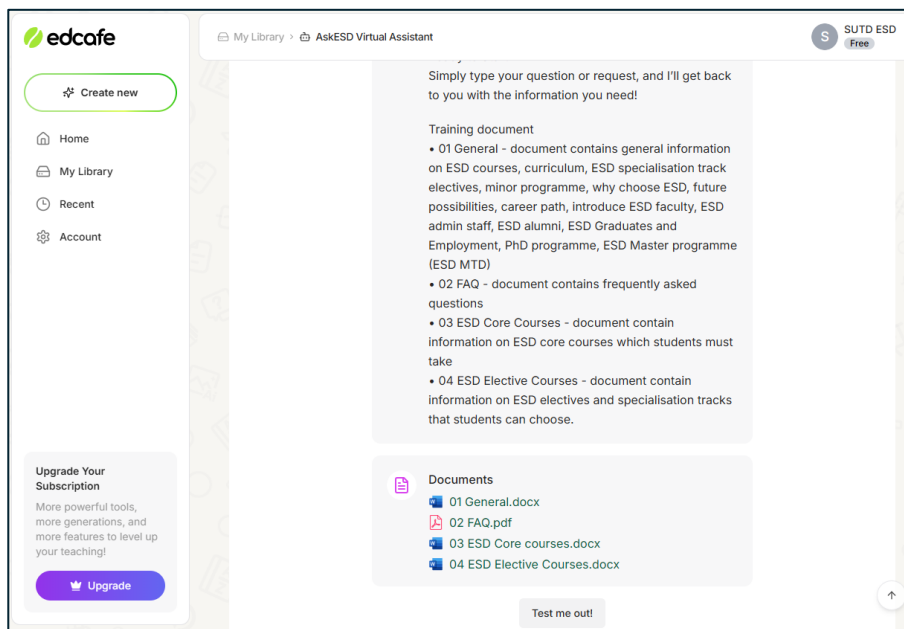


How did you go about creating the custom GPT?

We used the EdCafe.AI platform to build it. It's quite user-friendly for creating AI-powered virtual assistants tailored to specific topics. like our ESD programme.

Surprisingly, the set up was not that complicated. It started with four main steps:

1. Create an account on [EdCafe.AI](#).
2. Build the chatbot and assign it a clear name—ours was “AskESD.”
3. We wrote a custom instruction prompt, telling the bot what its role is—like helping visitors explore courses, careers, specialisations, and faculty.
4. Finally, we uploaded training materials: PDFs and Word documents that included: Curriculum guides, Core and elective course lists, FAQs, Career outcomes, minor options, and postgraduate pathways



So, the chatbot learns from those documents?

Exactly! It's trained to extract accurate information from that content. That's why the better the documents, the more helpful the bot becomes. We also gave it a friendly intro script and guidance tips to make it feel welcoming.

Any tips for others trying this?

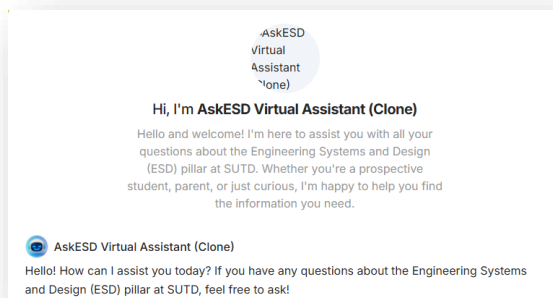
Yes, keep your instructions clear, cover anticipated questions in your documents, and always test the chatbot before launching. We learned a lot by observing how real visitors used it.



Can people still try AskESD now?

The Open House version is decommissioned. But we've made a limited-access, free demo version available here, <https://app.edcafe.ai/chatbot/6875a7a2490a55d0264a37d8>

The premium version was sponsored by Inknoe. The current link runs on EdCafe.AI's free plan with limited usage.



What did you learn from student interactions with the AskESD chatbot?

The pilot gave us valuable insights into what prospective students are most curious about. Many questions focused on: Career prospects after graduation, how ESD compares to other SUTD pillars, the role of mathematics and real-world application in the curriculum.

We also discovered that students appreciate clear, relatable explanations—especially when connecting their personal interests (like data or design) to course pathways. This feedback helps us refine our FAQs, course descriptions, and future chatbot training so we can serve students even better next time.

What is moving forward?

The AskESD pilot was just the beginning. Moving forward, we plan to compile more detailed training materials to improve the chatbot's responsiveness and accuracy. With adequate funding, we hope to evolve AskESD into a permanent feature on the ESD website, made available 24/7 to guide prospective students, parents, and curious visitors. By embedding smart, self-service AI into our digital outreach, we aim to make ESD more accessible, transparent, and student-friendly—anytime, anywhere.

That sounds like a meaningful step forward, not just for ESD, but how universities can engage with students. It's great to see tech being used not just for efficiency, but to make education more welcoming and accessible. Thanks so much for sharing the AskESD journey with us. We're excited to see how it evolves—and we'll definitely be watching for the next version at Open House 2026! The other pillars and clusters may join your journey too!