

The top five uses of speech recognition technology

The accuracy and acceptance of speech recognition has come a long way in the last few years and forward-thinking contact centre operations are now adopting this technology to enhance their operation and improve their bottom-line profitability.

Here Brett Feldon tells us his most popular uses of speech recognition technology.

1. Playing back simple information

If you have customers who need fast access to information.

In many circumstances customers do not actually need or want to speak to a live operator. For example, if they have little time or they only require basic information then speech recognition can be used to cut waiting times and provide customers with the information they want.

By deploying an intelligent speech recognition system, Dublin Airport was able to cope with a 30 per cent rise in passenger numbers without the need to increase staff levels.

Incoming customer calls are filtered according to requirements and those wanting basic information, say on 'departures' or 'arrivals', are automatically directed to the speech recognition system that quickly evaluates the nature of the enquiry through a series of prompts. At all times there is an option to speak with a live operator, if necessary. The system has been fine-tuned to pick up the vagaries of the Irish accent.

The average call time has been reduced to just 53 seconds, freeing up skilled agents for more complex calls.

2. Call steering

Putting callers through to the right department.

Waiting in a queue to get through to an operator or, worse still, finally being put through to the wrong operator can be very frustrating to your customer, resulting in dissatisfaction. By introducing speech recognition, you can allow callers to choose a 'self-service' route or alternatively 'say' what they want and be directed to the correct department or individual.

Standard Life is using speech recognition for its Life and Pensions business. The solution helps in three ways: it ascertains what the call is about, if necessary it takes the customer through security checks and then transfers the customer to the appropriate member of staff. The details that the customer has already provided appear on the screen so that they do not have to repeat the information.

Using this technology Standard Life increased its overall call handling capacity by over 25 per cent and reduced their misdirected calls by 66 per cent. The system also gives them a better understanding of why customers are calling, because it allows the customer to 'voice' their request rather than forcing them to conform to an organisation's preconceptions on what the customer wants.

3. Automated identification

Where you need to authenticate someone's identity on the phone without using 'risky' personal data.

Identity fraud is now one of the biggest concerns facing UK organisations and research by the UK's fraud prevention service (CIFAS) estimates that it is costing the UK £1.7bn a year. Some advanced speech recognition systems provide an answer to this problem using voice biometrics. This technology is now accepted as a major tool in combating telephone-based crime.

On average it takes less than two minutes to create a 'voiceprint' based on specific text such as 'Name' and 'Account Number'. This is then stored against the individual's record, so when they next call, they can simply say their name and if the voiceprint matches what they have stored, then the person is put straight through to a customer service representative. This takes less than 30 seconds and also bypasses the need for the individual to have to run through a series of tedious ID checks such as passwords, address details and so on.

Australia's 8th largest insurers, ahm Health Management is successfully using voice biometrics to allow existing account holders to speak to customer service representatives quickly and securely. The company has enrolled more than 20,000 customers' voiceprints.

4. Removing IVR menus

Replacing complicated and often frustrating 'push button' IVR.

Due to poorly implemented systems, IVR and automated call handling systems are often unpopular with customers.

However, there is a way to improve this scenario. Termed 'intelligent call steering' (ICS), it does not involve any 'button pushing'. The system simply asks the customer what they want (in their words, not yours) and then transfers them to the most suitable resource to handle their call.

Callers dial one number and are greeted by the message "Welcome to XYZ Company, how can I help you?" The caller is routed to the right agent within 20 to 30 seconds of the call being answered with misdirected calls reduced to as low as 3-5 per cent.

By introducing Natural Language Speech Recognition (NLSR), general insurance company Suncorp replaced its original push button IVR, enabling the customer to simply say what they wanted.

Using a financial services' statistical language model of over 100,000 phrases, the system can more accurately assess the nature of the call and transfer it first time to the appropriate department or advisor. The company reduced its call waiting times to around 30 seconds and misdirected calls to virtually nil.

5. Dealing with spikes in call volumes

You need to handle high volumes of customer service enquiries from repeat customers.

The betting industry is an example of a business that has very high volumes of calls from regular 'punters', most of which occur in irregular peaks and troughs. During a normal day, races occur every ten minutes with 80 per cent of calls occurring minutes before each race. To overcome this problem Ladbrokes was able to divert the calls depending simply on their nature, e.g. placing a bet, asking for odds, which were both handled automatically, or for more complex 'customised' bets they could speak directly to an operator. The system is effective on all race days, but on big race days such as The Grand National or The Cheltenham Gold Cup it enables the company to increase the capacity of its call centres without the need to add additional staff. A large database of over 40,000 registered horses and 6,000 football players are part of an extensive database that is updated in real time.

Brett Feldon is General Manager EMEA at VeCommerce, a global leader in the provision of Intelligent Call Steering, Voice Biometric and Voice Self-Service Solutions. www.vecommerce.co.uk

21 May 2008 - Filed under [Technology](#) , [speech recognition](#), [voice recognition](#)

Liked this article? Why not get our [free newsletter](#).

