



THE FUTURE OF IVR IN CUSTOMER SUPPORT: You've Come a Long Way, Baby!

Today, customers overwhelmingly use the phone to resolve their customer service problems and to escalate from Web or chat when those digital channels fail to meet their needs. Interactive voice response (IVR) systems have carried the heavy load of customer inquiries for decades, but in the words of Rodney Dangerfield, they just don't get no respect. And let's face it, really good IVR is difficult, and the demands placed on it have outstripped its technological limitations for much of its existence.

But time and technology marches on, and the landscape of available customer channels has expanded, offering new opportunities for successful customer self-service. In the following installment of CRM magazine's Best Practices series, we'll see how advances in both technology and processes have enabled modern IVRs to strengthen the value of next-generation self-service integrated solutions for customers and organizations alike.

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Defining the Future of Self-Service with Natural Language Understanding — from IVRs to Messaging Apps

The reports of IVR's death have been greatly exaggerated. IVR is alive and well and remains an efficient tool for routine inbound inquiries, as well as common outbound notifications like appointment reminders. However, today's modern customer wants access to information quickly, and on whatever communication channel is most convenient for them at that particular moment. While the channel they choose may not always be voice, some of the same technologies developed for IVR solutions are enabling these next generation self-service applications:

INTERACTIVE VIRTUAL ASSISTANTS

Interactive Virtual Assistant

\in- 'tər- 'ak-tiv\ | 'vər- chə-wəl\ | ə- 'sist- tənt

Interactive Virtual Assistants enable users to speak natural language voice commands and perform actions such as sending messages, placing calls and setting reminders. Interactive Virtual Assistants can also support extended dictation, enabling users to have their words translated into text for use in email and text messages, Facebook status updates, tweets, Web searches and similar operations.

Since the introduction of Apple's Siri in 2011, consumers have become familiar with and accepting of interactive virtual assistants, including Google Now, Amazon's Alexa and Microsoft's Cortana. The human-to-machine interactions are easy, convenient and increasingly accurate. These virtual assistants are paving the way for a new generation of IVR applications that benefit from advancements in Natural Language Understanding (NLU). Now more than ever, self-service enables companies to provide excellent service while lowering costs.

INTERACTIVE TEXT RESPONSE

Interactive Text Response

\in- 'tər- 'ak-tiv\ | 'tekst\ | ri- 'spän(t)s

Interactive Text Response (ITR) uses Natural Language Understanding to enable people to engage in personalized, conversational text interactions with an automated system. Simply ask a question and get an answer.

In this age of instant gratification, patience is lacking. "Waiting in line" and dealing with customer service representatives are, quite simply, things people are less inclined to do. With a text message, customers can ask a question and get a response that is fast, accurate and personal, despite not being sent by a human. Imagine customers having the ability to complete transactions such as renting a car, ordering take-out or interacting with appointment reminders that go beyond confirmations by managing cancellations or rescheduling. The same NLU technologies that power Intelligent Virtual Assistants help to enable automated text interactions for customer service.



MESSAGING APPS

Messaging Apps

\ 'me-sij- ing\ | \ 'aps

Messaging Apps enable messages to be sent and received. While it can refer to the texting app built into every cell phone and smartphone, it primarily defines a third-party app that is used in lieu of the carrier's app. Examples include Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp.

Nielsen reported that in 2008 for the first time people sent and received more text messages than phone calls. It's undeniable that texting has become a ubiquitous part of our lives. In fact, six of the top 10 smartphone apps used on a regular basis are messaging apps. Using messaging apps as a customer service tool can improve brand engagement, service and support levels and strengthen the voice of the brand.

NLU brings a conversational tone to self-service dialogues on messaging apps. This allows scale through automation, without getting that robotic feel of "chat bots." And, if conversations become complex, agents can easily pick up where self-service leaves off, resulting in a seamless customer experience. ■

The future of self-service applications is becoming a reality thanks to Natural Language Understanding. If you'd like to see NLU in action, go to: www.aspect.com/future-of-IVR



It's Time to Start Thinking About IVR Differently

For a long time now, IVR systems have earned a bad rap. IVR is one of the few technologies that has not kept pace in the contact center, and now, people have an outdated understanding of true IVR capabilities. Voice self-service can be great if and when it is done correctly.

It's time to start thinking about IVR differently.

BETTER IVR CAN HELP SOLVE REAL BUSINESS PROBLEMS

Every technology vendor comes to the table with cost savings and a better customer experience as differentiators. But what else can a vendor bring? What more does an enhanced solution offer? For example, in addition to cost savings and customer experience, a solution might bring increased operational efficiency because you can identify process flaws more easily. But because IVR touches the customer directly, any problem that a business faces – inside or outside the contact center – can be affected by an enhanced IVR solution.

For example, let's say one of the key touchpoints for your business is direct mailings to your database. It's not realistic to expect customers to always update address information on their own, but it's vital to your business that addresses are up-to-date – your sales funnel depends on it. That doesn't seem to have much to do with an IVR, right? Wrong. An advanced solution should have the capability to handle outbound address update calls and automatically make the changes in your company's CRM database. This simple and proactive solution helps you keep the sales funnel full and, ultimately, maintain revenue goals. But you can't perform these calls with any old IVR; it takes a highly specialized application with excellent speech recognition capabilities to handle these higher complexity tasks.

EFFORT MATTERS

Customers choose the channel they choose based on which one they think will require the least amount of effort, and, as industry analyst Nancy Jamison says, "You're only as good as your weakest channel." For many companies, IVR has devolved into their weakest channel because it has largely gone ignored over the past ten or fifteen years. But these outdated IVR systems generally put customers through high effort experiences, whether in the inability to perform tasks or even trapping them in "IVR jail." Customer effort has the most impact on loyalty of any measurement, so the longer you keep the IVR that everyone hates, the more you risk losing the loyalty of your customers.

Then again, forget customer effort for a second – replacing your IVR sounds like a huge amount of effort from you and your IT staff! Frankly, that isn't always the case. In the direct mail example above, that is just one specific call type that reduces effort, solves a business problem, and doesn't require a system overhaul. As that call type succeeds, you begin to identify other problem areas that could benefit from the technology. Using an agile methodology, you can embark on a journey to redesign all of your customer service processes and update your voice system incrementally and iteratively.

DON'T "DO NOTHING"

The biggest mistake to be made is to opt for the "do nothing" approach. Often, the shiny piece of new technology is what gets the most attention, but the longer the IVR is ignored, it gets exponentially worse. The fact is that customers are still picking up the phone to call you:

- 75% of customers have successfully resolved issues on the phone (compared to just 11% on a website and 5% on social media) [Ovum Research, 2015];

- 68% of all contact center communications are still handled on the phones [Ameyo, 2015];
- 45% of consumers switch from online to voice if their questions are not handled quickly [Ameyo, 2015].

And, according to a survey done by Desk, 56% of respondents think they will use the phone primarily to interact with customer service in 10 years [Desk, 2015]. Some of these responses likely refer to live agent conversations, but it is naïve to think that all of your customers only want to speak to agents. With the rise of voice technologies – Siri, Amazon Echo, Ok Google, in-car navigation systems – people have become increasingly comfortable conversing with machines. And the better the voice technology works, the more likely customers are to choose it.

With new innovative technology that allows for customized, personalized, and predictive relationships with customers, it is an exciting time for customer experience designers. As you evaluate next steps in your contact center operation, it's important to include voice self-service in those discussions. It just may help to solve that organizational issue you're facing. ■

About SmartAction

SmartAction offers one-of-a-kind Artificial Intelligence (AI) voice self-service for businesses of all sizes. Our Intelligent Voice Automation (IVA®), a cloud-based artificial intelligence platform, provides 100% natural language voice self-service, which allows callers to easily complete requests without the use of a Live Agent. In turn, we help companies provide an effortless customer experience while reducing operating costs.

For more information:
www.smartaction.com



The Future of IVR Customer Service Assurance

Consumers today are more socially aware of products and services, and customer retention is critical to profitability since acquiring a new customer is the most expensive phase of the relationship. The challenge businesses face is how to proactively serve their customer in a mutually satisfactory way, with customers feeling empowered to use self-service tools and programs.

Voice of the Customer (VOC) programs have a very attractive return on investment story, with organizations seeing revenue increases from customer referrals of 7.6% and a 6.3% reduction in the average cost in customer contact.¹ Many of these programs solicit feedback from customers who have interacted with an agent, but there are two deficiencies with this narrow focus. First, this may not be the majority of customer contacts; with the enterprise seeking higher margins and lower cost of contact, the overwhelming emphasis is on higher containment and more aggressive use of self-service application enablement, so agent and customer contacts are simply just the tip of the iceberg. Second, psychological studies and research have shown that consumers modify their answers in particular scenarios based on perceived consequences, whether they be in compensation and credits to their accounts or the reaction of the human agent they interacted with.

The role of the IVR is, in most instances, to “front end” the agent and hopefully enable customers to retrieve information or implement changes to their accounts easily. So, what is the impact the IVR is having on customer service and the customer experience? According to some research, the top two issues resulting in a negative contact center experiences, accounting for 77% of the cases studied, had to do with customers having to repeat information to the IVR.² So, in this instance, are agents being set up for failure? Is the onus on the agent to recover this CX experience? Does the VOC program even cover these instances?

Designed Poorly with Poorly Functioning Technology

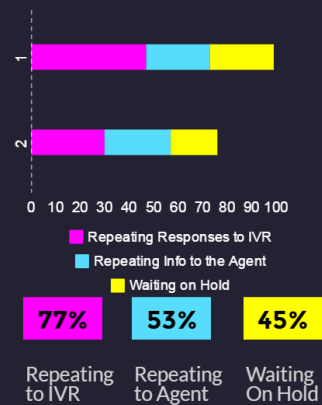
People View IVR's as obstacles to achieving their tasks, when asked why their reasons cited poor menu design and inaccurate recognition

Frustrations With IVR



Negative Experience

Customers were asked to rank the reasons for a negative contact center experience.



In yet another study, almost 50% of those interviewed had a negative opinion on the value of an IVR and how it's deployed to assist them. The interesting point of this research points out that the younger demographic is more willing to use a self-service IVR platform.³

THE HESITATION TO ADOPT CHANGE

Businesses that adopt new technologies like voice biometrics, visual IVR, and natural language menu redesigns will find themselves in a finger-pointing game when the return on investment in terms of customer satisfaction and lower operating costs these new technologies offered is not immediately realized. This is precisely what occurs when faced with an inability to differentiate usability design issues, technological failures, and networking interoperability problems.

The true challenge of building a comprehensive contact center assurance program is getting reliable, objective metrics of the customer experience, external of the organization's technology,

combined with the data and intelligence of the network and the applications riding on top of it. More importantly, the ability to segregate user and agent behavior from application performance, use, and capabilities in an objective, repeatable, and scientific fashion is the only way to establish a “control case” to map the technology changes, user interface changes, and the experience perceptions that all ultimately impact customer satisfaction.

EMBRACE CHANGE AND DEPLOY WITH CONFIDENCE

Empirix can assist organizations looking to build a contact center assurance program that helps them:

- Automate customer use cases so developers can accelerate releases
- Deploy cutting-edge technology with confidence
- Ensure systems are operating as designed and intended
- Detect, respond to, and remediate service interruptions and measure their impact on revenue



AUTOMATED REGRESSION AND USABILITY TESTS

Automating customer use cases in a platform offering individual step-by-step performance metrics of the IVR system can measure the content, conformance and delivery of the IVR. The platform should also be able to use human-like intelligence to take action in those grey areas of a speech application to determine if it should or should not ask for clarification of what was spoken—this is crucial to understanding if the technology is consistent in the experience it delivers, enabling the business to understand if it is providing value or increasing frustration. This platform should also be able to swap out the gender and culture of the automated speaker so the IVR can be tested against regional differences and consumer demographics. This isn't necessarily a QA person's responsibility; this may be a UX/UI team's goal for objective measurements in non-visual interfaces.

SCALABILITY AND FAILOVER TESTING

The scalability of the solution and its viability in certain component-level failure situations isn't just an IT operations issue; it's a customer service issue, which cannot be measured without a controlled and repeatable level of testing from the customer perspective. The measurement of "event windows," detection triggers, and automated recovery is a complex endeavor; Empirix routinely assist our customers measure and build best-in-class solutions for monitoring those individual components, mapping them to business based attributes and dependencies and offering automated methods for recovery.

AUTOMATED PRODUCTION MONITORING INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE CLOUD

Because these automated use cases are such a basic but useful tool, this work must be able to be leveraged (not recreated) by operations staff for ongoing continuous monitoring of what is known as the "control case." This "Proactive Automated

Customer Experience" transaction will let companies measure the PACE of the production systems as a known and reliable use case. Executing outside of corporate systems and environment provides additional perspective regarding carrier utilization, and the public network offers insight into how the cloud is delivering on its promise—specifically, if it's causing any obstacles to customer satisfaction in terms of speed of access or availability.

COMBINED COMPONENT AND TRANSACTIONAL-BASED MONITORING

Vendors offer insight into how their individual components are functioning, but they don't do a great job of mapping the interdependencies among the equipment handling the call, the equipment gathering the CTI data, and the routers getting information from or to third-party networks. They also can't accurately measure the user experience of those transactions, but this is, after all, the reason organizations deploy these solutions in the first place.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

When an IVR platform is refreshed—whether with a natural language menu rewrite, voice biometric passwords, or virtual on hold queuing—to offer a significantly improved customer experience with less IVR talk time, faster access to data, and more self-service options, the business wants to see positive results.

Over time, the workforce optimization platform adjusts to the new platform's capabilities and re-distributes the workforce accordingly, but what occurs when the new deployment or platform was deployed using less than best practice methodology listed above?

The aggregation and organization of this data is critical when the IVR platform starts to re-prompt callers for information and callers get frustrated and either opt-out intentionally or are forced out due to application logic. When containment rates drop 5% and customer satisfaction drops 3%,

the business will feel its impact **in real-time** and direct operations teams to remediate the issue. In situations like this, it isn't the operational metric of **Mean Time To Repair** that is going to save the organization, it's the **Mean Time To Understand** what is causing the issue before a plan to repair can be put into place. Having proactive automated customer experience transactions and back-end-transactions looking at application-level performance and system component health, overlaid on top of network statistics at a device and route level, gives teams the information they need to classify technical abnormalities and distinguish them from usability issues. The proactive automated customer experience transaction will assist them in understanding if the user theoretically could achieve their intended task rather than their desire to bypass it. Data analytics and classifying issues in real time is how businesses will build their contact center assurance programs to ensure the IVRs of the future continue to protect customer satisfaction numbers—rather than ruin them. ■

About Empirix

Empirix helps service providers, mobile operators, contact centers and businesses master complexities and optimize business processes to reduce operational costs, maximize customer retention and grow top-line revenue. Through testing, monitoring, analytics and intelligence, Empirix helps companies around the world realize the full value of their technology investments.

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¹ (Minkara & Pinder Jr, Voice of the Customer: Big Data as a Strategic Advantage, 2014)

² (Schwitters, 2015)

³ (Katz, 2015)



The Future of Interactive Voice Response (IVR) in Customer Support

What goes through your mind every time you have to call your bank, your Internet service provider, or get tech support from your cable company? Probably something like: “I hope I don’t get stuck in the phone menu from hell.”

The telephone remains a popular choice for support. Customers today want answers instantly. They expect that a real person will be ready with that answer. While an email or a Tweet might take time for a response, a phone call presents the possibility of instant gratification.

Phone support done right can be a tremendous brand asset — we’ve all heard the stories about phone support that goes above and beyond. Trader Joe’s employees who answered a call for grocery delivery to an elderly man. The ThinkGeek customer agent who activated a \$5.00 gift card to ensure a husband’s holiday surprise. Ritz-Carlton staff giving a lost stuffed animal the photo album of his life before mailing him home....

IVR SYSTEM TO THE RESCUE

With careful planning, an interactive voice response system (IVR) can help change the reputation of phone support. Cloud-based IVR systems are flexible to implement — especially popular with small and mid-sized businesses whose goal is to avoid costly and unwieldy infrastructure.

With an IVR system in place, businesses can:

- Automate the customer identification process with voice prompts
- Predict why customers are calling to speed up service
- Collect important information from the customer during wait time
- Prioritize calls based on value
- Personalize messages and prompts
- Handle high call volume and surges efficiently

- Ensure customers are routed to the best agent for their issue
- Track and report customer issues to improve future service
- Reduce overhead costs, including staffing

A BRIGHT FUTURE FOR IVR

Cloud-based tools are constantly evolving to make agents and customer lives easier and simpler. IVR systems will continue to play a pivotal role, mainly because there is so much scope for scalability and innovation. Key areas include:

APPLICATION-PROGRAMMING INTERFACE (API)

Customers are the best ambassadors for your business. As extensive users of your product, they are always looking for ways to maximize ROI — and are likely to rely heavily on support. This dependency is critical, so IVR systems will add flexibility by supporting APIs that enable integration with other vendors and applications. These integrations unlock a host of ways for customers to use your product and interact with your business. The future of IVR holds the promise of greater personalization and contextual awareness that will elevate the customer experience.

INFORMATION EXTENSIONS

Customer issues present themselves in endless variety. With an IVR system in place, the most common customer problems can be tackled with an automated response. On the other hand, if customer problems are unique, then agents can be ready to address them immediately. In the future, customers can be routed in tighter, more efficient systems that improve response times and customer satisfaction.

IMPROVED USER INTERFACE (UI)

In the world of customer service, the mantra for the future is “less is always

more.” As popular as the telephone is, by the time customers reach a support agent, they are often frustrated. Despite the self-serve nature of phone support, it’s essential to manage the process to keep menu options to a minimum, avoid marketing messages, and above all minimize wait times. It’s critical to test and re-test the IVR experience to make sure the process is not losing you customers.

BUSINESS VALUE AND IMPACT

Having the right IVR system in place has significant benefits for businesses. The ability to track the campaigns that are driving the conversations means you can adjust your messaging and hone your responses. Conducting customer surveys and tracking marketing and sales activities brings valuable insights that are bound to fuel customer acquisition, target the right prospects, support sales efforts, and improve revenue strategies.

A thoughtfully deployed IVR is a confidence builder for customers. A simple, powerful IVR system will please customers. Imagine the delight of approaching a support call with pleasure instead of dread! ■

About Freshdesk

Freshdesk is a full-fledged cloud based customer support solution that offers everything a business needs to deliver exceptional support. The built-in phone channel in Freshdesk delivers a full fledged call center that you can deploy on the cloud, making it an ideal platform for you to get up and running in no time. With Freshdesk’s multi-channel capabilities, businesses can now take calls, address support tickets, respond to emails and more — using a unified dashboard.

For more information:
www.freshdesk.com



Has Your IVR Come a Long Way? Join The Next-Gen Self-Service Revolution!

When IVR (Interactive Voice Response) entered the customer service scene, it was expected to revolutionize the entire customer experience. Agents would be a thing of the past as customers would be able to quickly and easily self-serve. As we all know, that's not how things played out.

More recently, due to the rise of new digital communication channels, the IVR fell further and further down the list of customer service priorities to improve. Yet, at the same time, the underlying technology of the IVR has been steadily improving. Using current capabilities, the IVR can truly do what it was expected to do – revolutionize the customer experience. Yet, the modern IVR is still battling legacy systems and platforms, its predecessor's bad reputation, and frankly, a lack of sex appeal. Who wants to update their IVR when they can implement the latest social media support channel?

IMPROVED CALLER EXPERIENCE IN THE IVR

Why should you care about the phone channel? Simply put: because the data shows people are still calling. The forecasts that predicted the death of the phone channel due to increased use of digital channels were wrong. In reality, the phone channel is still the most used support channel. The Dimension Data 2016 Global Contact Center report shows the phone channel comprising 58% of all customer contacts, while all the digital channels combined total only 42%.

What technology improvements have occurred that could improve the caller experience in the IVR? The automated language used in IVR (or natural language) is vastly better than in years past, though does remain expensive to implement and maintain. Voice biometrics is another example of significantly improved technology that simplifies callers' experiences through voice "fingerprints". Arguably though, the best improvement comes with the benefit of carrying context from one channel to another, i.e., personalizing the IVR. By maintaining a real-time record of what

customers are doing in which channel, the opportunity exists to predict what they will want to do next, and offer them that option when they contact you through the IVR.

BENEFITS ACHIEVED BY UPDATING THE IVR

Can you achieve true business benefits by updating the IVR? Yes. And again, the data proves it.

As found by Ovum, when the IVR is personalized, self-service rates improve by two times. This is a HUGE cost savings by enabling customers to fully achieve their tasks inside the IVR without the need to talk to an agent and while maintaining customer satisfaction.

Or, take a recent Forrester Consulting report. Genesys commissioned Forrester to conduct a study examining the potential return on investment (ROI) enterprises may realize by deploying an Omnichannel Engagement Center solution. [The Total Economic Impact™](#) (TEI) study helps validate and measure ROI in a modern omnichannel contact center. Among other findings, the study determined:

- Using IVR-gathered data and customer history resulted in a decreased average handle time of 12.5%
- An improved customer routing of self-service to assisted service which translated into greater than \$1M in net revenue
- A strong IVR contribution to the total economic benefit of greater than \$24M over a five-year period by reducing handle time
- An addition of a web chat feature created a smart self-service option that reduces customer abandonment

To effectively compete, your IVR needs to immediately set your customers off on a better customer journey. Implementing a unified view of the customer, by integrating with the CRM and capturing information during the IVR process, is key. Primarily,



in addition to providing a satisfying experience when customers can self-serve, it reduces handle times once the caller reaches an agent. A personalized IVR recognizes customers and knows what's transpired in the past and dynamically offers this context to the agent so they can use it to shorten handle time. This improves the agent's experience since they no longer face the customer's frustration in repeating their information to them, and they can feel a new sense of pride of handling their calls more effectively and participating in upsell opportunities.

An improved IVR is vitally important—not just as the front door of your company—but to reduce costs, improve efficiencies, increase satisfaction levels of agents, and optimize customer experience. As evidenced in the Forrester report, the ROI for implementing an omnichannel engagement center solution is very tangible with increased revenues, decreased costs, and better efficiencies.

While there are many more questions to be asked and answered regarding IVR, hopefully this provided a quick overview of why IVR is not dying, but instead proves that it has evolved and can revolutionize your customer experience. Get the eBook [Your Definitive Guide to IVR](#) to be sure you're providing next generation IVR and the best possible customer experiences. ■