



Considering a speech recognition solution for your call centre: how can you achieve cost savings AND satisfy your customers?

Many call centres use speech recognition solutions which have delivered cost savings. However, according to some assessments conducted, such solutions often don't satisfy customers. This happens when other elements of the interaction aren't optimal, such as long wait times, or when the technology is used to prevent customers accessing agents.

Customers evaluate their contact with the centre in terms of:

- (1) their problem or enquiry is resolved
- (2) the time to answer a call
- (3) the time and ability to resolve issues without transfers to other agents
- (4) access to a courteous agent whom they can understand
- (5) agents who show they want to help.

Customers are much happier when these points are met. If speech solutions are used to help address these points, then satisfaction levels will be higher.

With this in mind, it is clear that organisations can make a difference to customer service, and thus to competition, by improving customer interaction with the call centre. We'll look at how this can be done in line with the goal to reduce costs.

A study conducted in the US (Anton & Setting '04), gives the following primary reasons for a call to customer service:

complaint	low value	technical support	high value
11%	15.45%	25.66%	34.99%
<i>only complaints</i>	<i>requests for account balance, order status, address change</i>	<i>only technical support</i>	<i>requests for product information, purchases, reservations, payments</i>

For each reason, of those customers that spoke with an agent, the following shows the % that exceeded expectations:

complaint	low value	technical support	high value
19.42%	37.04%	18.76%	24.79%

As we can see, low value calls scored the highest %, that is, the performance of agents exceeded expectations more for this call type. In some call centres, these types of calls are automated (using speech)¹. It is easier to give good service on low value calls than those relating to technical issues which

¹ In Australia, payments applications are typically automated using speech or touchtone. It is not clear in the Anton and Setting study why payments is ranked as a high value call.



typically require more interaction and ability to solve an issue. Complaints generally relate to problems with products or services.

While these figures are for interaction with an agent, similar scores would be expected for automated applications. Overall customers are happiest with the service provided for low value calls.

The majority of customers' interactions with an organisation is via the phone. In a 2005 survey (Aspect Software), it was found that consumers are highly satisfied with the following:

- voice-activated instead of using phone keypad
- automatic callback²
- email option instead of phone

In sum, this finding shows that customers are happier when given more contact choices. It also shows customers prefer voice activated (or speech recognition) systems over those requiring phone keypad inputs (touchtone). If we combine both these findings, our conclusion would be: if automating calls, automate low value ones and make them voice activated.

Automating calls will reduce call centre costs and, if the automated calls are voice activated not touch tone, customer satisfaction levels will be higher.

Now let's consider how customers would access low value voice activated applications. Calls to an organisation's customer service are typically directed via a set of menus using touchtone. However we now know that customers prefer using speech and want faster access to agents. Faster access would mean throwing out menus and allowing for freer speech. This can be achieved using a speech call routing application which allows customers to say what they are calling about. In many cases, this means a customer can be directed immediately to an agent or to an automated self service application. While this would improve customer satisfaction, there are a number of beneficial consequences to the organisation. The most important of these is the reduction of transfers.

Transfers are costly to a call centre due to the time required to speak with one agent and then another. From the customer point of view, it is also a time issue. So by reducing transfers, customers are able to access what they want faster with less effort (ie no repeating information). In this way the call centre is able to service customers better.

In sum, speech recognition can achieve cost benefits to your organisation and improve or maintain customer satisfaction levels – a win win solution.

References:

Anton, Jon Dr & Setting, Teresa, 'The American Consumer Reacts to the Call Center Experience and the Offshoring of Service Calls', 2004 BenchmarkPortal, Kelly Services
'The 2005 Aspect Contact Center Satisfaction Index Executive Report', Aspect Software, 2005 MA

² Automatic callback is not an option that is often available. It can be used when wait times in a queue are of a certain length and the customer is given an option to wait or to have someone call them back.