Re-thinking your Voice Strategy

Upgrade your system to meet today's expectations

> " Voice is marketing's most significant paradigm shift this decade - one that has far reaching implications for how brands engage customers and prospects."
>
> *— Forrester, 2018, The Brand Experience Playbook*

For many years, the only option for consumers in need of support was to pick up the phone and call a company. Customer service call centers got a bad rep due to long hold times and frustrating answer trees. And although IVR technology has come a long way since then, in recent years the rise of chatbots and other digital channels available for consumers to contact companies when they need help have led some businesses to believe voice systems are outdated, and not worth investing or re-investing in.

The truth is, just as the phones that consumers use to call on have changed significantly, IVR has changed, too—and continues to. Additionally, the massive adoption of VPAs (Siri, Alexa, Google Home) has made consumers more used to talking to 'technology', and shifted their expectations of a positive voice interaction. If your voice system has been around since the rotary phone, it's time to re-think your strategy for the modern digital era.

The Evolution of Voice Systems

Traditional IVR was intended to route callers to the correct department or agent so they could get what they needed faster. But in reality, for callers it often felt more like a barrier standing in the way of them speaking with an actual person. For decades, voice technology crawled along, taking only occasional steps forward. Then came the digital revolution, and the quantum leaps in technology that changed everything— including IVR.

Customers still love the phone, and call volumes remain high, but with consumers rapidly adopting new devices, channels, and ways to communicate with companies, it's no longer the only option for customer service. At the same time, acting as the bouncer between a caller and an agent is no longer the only job a modern voice system can do. Dramatic advancements across a spectrum of speech technology, including text-to-speech (TTS), speech-to-text (STT), natural language processing (NLP), natural language understanding (NLU), and natural language generation (NLG) – enabled through deep neural networks (DNN) and advanced machine learning (ML), have taken voice interactions to the next level. Enterprises can take advantage of these advances to automate interactions intelligently and effortlessly for customers, transforming traditional IVRs into AI-powered conversational IVRs.

> "There will be 8 billion digital voice assistants in use by 2023, up from the 2.5 billion assistants in use at the end of 2018."
>
> *—Juniper Research*

Modern Voice Systems Enable Blended Experiences

This step forward also gives companies the ability to combine AI-powered voice systems with other technology to create cross-channel experiences that are conversational and efficient. In an AI-powered platform, voice systems are perfectly positioned to take on this new role, no longer acting as the bouncer, but rather as the concierge, able to do more than ask questions and wait for preset responses.

As the focal point for all voice contacts, an intelligent voice system can immediately engage a customer across many channels — no more long holds or annoying music. It can interpret the customer's request and provide the correct reply and next steps — no more frustrating answer trees or "I didn't quite get that, let's try again" exchanges. And in most cases, AI-powered voice systems can initiate actions through back-end integrations with other systems to resolve the customer's issue.

The majority of customer service contacts begin on the web, which means a web-aware voice system can personalize the conversation by anticipating why the consumer is engaging. The personalized experience improves resolution time and boosts customer satisfaction. For callers using a smartphone, a modern voice system can turn the conversation into a blended visual experience by pushing visual aids, such as product or account information, right to their screen, which makes it quicker and easier to get things done. Additionally, the conversation can seamlessly be transitioned to Chat – saving companies considerable cost by deflecting easily-resolved voice contacts to the lower-cost channel.

83%
of U.S. adult Internet users had a phone conversation with a customer service representative in the past year."[1]

With an AI-powered platform that includes a modern-day voice system, enterprises can not only support omnichannel experiences, but also opti-channel experiences – the optimal channel for each interaction. If the IVR is not able to provide resolution through self-service, it can use all the data and knowledge available to determine which resource is best positioned to help a customer and seamlessly transfer them to that resource. This includes connecting them to a live voice or chat agent.

Keep up, and Stay Ahead
As consumer technology continues to advance at breakneck speed, enterprises need to keep up by refreshing their IT and contact center infrastructure to keep up with ever-changing demands. Voice interactions now include conversations initiated on VPAs such as Siri, Alexa, and Google Assistant. The AI-powered conversational IVR is ready to meet this new challenge, answering the "call" by using cross-channel data to anticipate the intent, natural language to discern the purpose, and automation to provide an audible response. This presents another opportunity to gain value by upgrading your existing system and enable conversational commerce, when customers use voice technology to establish a relationship with a business and not only get information and support, but also carry out value-based transactions.

By 2023, customers will prefer to use speech interfaces to initiate **70%** **of self-service customer interactions,** rising from 40% today.[2]

Rather than writing off the IVR system as outdated, enterprises need to shift to an AI-powered conversational IVR approach to support omnichannel conversations—including traditional voice, VPAs, chat, and messaging. This will allow businesses to ensure customer experiences are efficient, successful, and on-brand, however they occur.

> "With a CVR approach, enterprises have the ability to build conversational services that anticipate, recognize, and respond to each consumer's intent in a voice that is consistent with each brand's image and, of course, 'Voice'."
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> —*Opus Research, 2018, "Conversational Voice Response: Bringing the Best Tech Forward"*

To learn more about how you can improve customer experience by upgrading to an AI-powered voice system, **visit us online.**

[1] Forrester, August 2017, "Voice Channel as Self-Service"
[2] Gartner, 2018, "Predicts 2019: CRM Customer Service and Support"

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