

## **Insider Tips on Transitioning Your IVR From Touch Tone to Speech**

Elaine Cascio, Vanguard Communications

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If you're like most companies, you're considering deploying speech recognition to replace your existing touch tone interface. You may even be planning an implementation right now. Speech recognition can provide a host of benefits – an improved and streamlined user interface, enhanced usability, higher IVR containment rates – but only if you carefully plan the migration from existing touch tone applications to speech. Here are six things that can make the difference between a successful transition and a customer service nightmare.

### **1. Plan your overall self service approach**

In our multi-channel world, customers have more and more ways of doing business. Self service, including IVR, is just a part of the whole equation. But in many cases, no one “owns” or champions the multi-channel customer experience, and each channel operates in its own silo. Even worse, each silo may be using different back end data.

So, if you haven't done it already, this is the time to build a self service strategy. Look at the functionality across all self service channels. Determine where you want to focus your self service efforts by understanding key customer segments and their needs. Build self service channels and applications around your customers, rather than around products and services.

While you're at it, really assess your IVR application. If you're like many businesses, you implemented IVR four or more years ago. Although you've added applications and made a few tweaks here and there, it hasn't changed much and may not reflect best practices. Do you really have the “right” applications in the IVR, or are some better suited to a web interface? Make sure functionality aligns with channels: even though ASR enables you to offer new functionality, many complex applications are still better offered on your website or other channels.

### **2. Select the right partners**

With ASR, you rely on vendors' expertise in user interface, dialogue design, accuracy, and a host of other areas where most corporate IT or telecom departments have little or no experience. Look for partners who understand your business requirements, who have implemented similar applications in similar environments, who are willing to guarantee service levels for recognition, and who won't cut corners on testing.

### **3. Use a customer centric approach to applications**

A customer centric approach will help you develop intuitive, easy to use ASR applications, so keep your customers involved as you develop applications. Conduct focus groups in order to understand when customers would use a speech enabled IVR over other channels, what applications they prefer to use in speech over touchtone. Have them share their thoughts about some of the really good ASR applications they've used recently.

Get your service reps involved in designing, acceptance testing and spot testing your applications, too – their insights are valuable. And keep callers and CSRs involved after implementation. Regularly survey them about their experience, feedback, or suggestions for your ASR application after it's up and running.

#### **4. Develop a transition plan**

You probably have callers who have used your touchtone application for years and are comfortable with it. You'll need to explore ways to transition customers from touchtone to speech and work with your vendors on successful transition strategies. Talk to other organizations to see what works well and what doesn't. You may decide to have new customers use the speech application and gradually transition existing customers to the new interface. Or you might decide to offer both a touchtone application and an ASR application for a certain period of time (if you do this, make sure your touchtone application is up to snuff!).

Once you develop your transition plan, communicate! Tell callers what to expect, notify agents and train them on the new application.

#### **5. Test, Test, Test**

Usability testing is always important, but is even more critical with ASR. Usability test to ensure that dialogue design is accurate and the vocabularies are complete. For example, if you're doing hotel bookings and ask for a checkout date, make sure you accept phrases like "the next day" or "two days later" in addition to the day of the week or a month and date. Testing also allows you to get feedback on the "personality" of the application to ensure users find it attractive and it matches your corporate image.

Early usability testing of a prototype or "Wizard of Oz" testing will also help you with decisions on design issues. For example, should you use directed dialogue or are you able to use more free form natural language? You may decide to use natural language in some areas of the application and directed dialogue in others, based on how customers respond to the prototype.

Error recovery with a speech interface is very different from touchtone, so you can't use the old "I don't understand you" three times before transferring a caller. User thresholds for error vary depending on what they're trying to do, where they are in the application, and whether the IVR can offer a suitable alternative.

Finally, don't cut corners on acceptance testing – test every possible scenario at each point in the application before you introduce it to customers.

#### **6. Put together a comprehensive metrics plan**

Despite having IVR systems in place for years, many companies aren't measuring the right things, or aren't measuring at all. Make sure you have some accurate metrics in place for your existing touchtone application that you can use to benchmark the new ASR application. Don't discount the value of the semi-automated call where a customer may be able to accomplish 75% of the call in the IVR and then transfer to an agent for the remaining 25%.

Also make sure that you measure success based on your self service strategy, examining the role and use of the ASR applications in the context of other contact channels.

Elaine Cascio is Vice President responsible for Vanguard's self service practice, and is an advocate for customer centric voice response design and for building multi-channel self service strategies. She has over twenty years of experience in customer contact assessment, voice response application development, and user interface design.

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