

Technology Myth-busters – What Does VoIP Really Get You?

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I take advantage of time on airplanes to catch up on my reading. Lately, to my seatmates' dismay, I spend much of the flight exclaiming 'WHAT?!?!?' out loud and muttering to myself about what I read that's confusing, misleading, or just plain wrong. This technology myth-buster article is an attempt to clear up some of confusion about VoIP (Voice over IP).

VoIP seems to be at the center of a batch of misleading articles and statements I've read in recent months. The key areas of confusion revolve around IVR Speech applications, Computer Telephony Integration (CTI), and Intelligent Routing. Some of the myths we've read and heard (even from our clients!) include:

- ◆ 'Vendor X told us that VoIP will give us CTI'
- ◆ 'VoIP provides better algorithms to route calls to the agent with the right skillset'
- ◆ 'VoIP is 'digital' and therefore enables IVR Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR) and CTI applications'.

Let's take a look at the myths around these applications, enablers, and technologies one by one...

VoIP

First, let's get VoIP straight. VoIP is primarily a different method of getting calls from one place to another, or as is sometimes explained, 'it's just different plumbing.' Most contact center applications and functions can be provided by either TDM (Time Division Multiplex) switches or VoIP systems (both, by the way are 'digital'). The differences between the two are cost, architecture, and operational trade-offs and benefits. VoIP is the *architectural* direction all telecommunications vendors are moving in, but don't assume that your relatively new TDM system is a boat anchor - it can continue to serve you well for a number of years.

IVR

We see a growing number of IVR speech applications among our client base. Does ASR require VoIP? Possibly, if you're considering replacing your PBX/ACD replacement at the same time, and/or looking to implement a disaster recovery, multi-site architecture. Keep in mind that a large portion of the costs associated with a new ASR IVR platform are software licenses and application development so there is a relatively small difference in cost, and no difference in *application* features between TDM and VoIP based IVRs.

CTI

Another myth is that CTI is a free benefit, or part of VoIP. But again, CTI was around long before VoIP. CTI is an application that uses call and caller information collected (via IVR and ACD applications, etc.) to perform three primary functions:

1. Route (or treat) calls intelligently within the ACD
2. Provide a screen pop or data pop of information at the agent's desktop when a call is received.
3. Provide consolidated reporting across multiple systems (ACD, IVR, CRM, etc.).

VoIP can support advanced call delivery if you have multiple sites and/or home agents, but the bottom line is that the transport method (VoIP or TDM) is invisible to the CTI application.

Call Routing

Another myth is that VoIP somehow improves call routing, enabling additional agent segmentation, special caller treatment, or prioritizing calls. Again, these functions and capabilities are typically housed in a 'routing engine' that is separate from the ACD/PBX infrastructure - it doesn't matter whether it's TDM or VoIP. In fact, some ACD solution providers are getting out of the infrastructure switching business completely and focusing on creating ACD routing and reporting applications that overlay an existing switching (read plumbing) infrastructure that can be TDM or VoIP.

VoIP is the future, and does provide real business benefits to organizations, but no matter what you read or hear, VoIP *is not* a prerequisite for IVR Speech Recognition, CTI, or Intelligent Call Routing applications.

Have a myth that's got you all worked up? Tell Technology myth-busters at dpowis@vanguard.net.

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