



**Happy New Year from
Ohio Data Transfer**

THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX IN CUSTOMER SERVICE

Look for announcement of new generation 6.0 soon

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Case Study on Middletown

Editor's Note:

I thought it would be interesting to look at the City of Middletown this month. Middletown is running on a Unix based platform and also takes live credit/debit card payments through the ODT VISION VRU.

City managers faces many challenges with the down-turn that is taking place in their small micro-economy. The city budget have been very frugal with only a 2% yearly growth over the past several years but, the downturn has been very severe and cutbacks are a must in many departments. Efficiency must be obtained throughout the city.

This case study will review why Middletown chose the ODT VISION, what implementation & customization was like, and how the managers plan for the VRU to help meet the current needs of the city. Sometimes you have to spend money to save money.

Middletown is a medium size city of 55 thousand which covers 25 square miles. It is located about half way between Dayton and Cincinnati. The city currently has 465 employees who work in a main central administrative office and 15 remote city support sites. The city provides all the usual municipal services.

The city has been blessed

over the years with a strong industrial base which includes AK Steel and several paper mills. These industries were drawn to Middletown because of the natural underground water supply and the nearby Great Miami River. However; many of the steel and paper jobs which made the city so prosperous are now gone.

The city has always been very fiscally conservative with only a 3 % yearly budget growth over the past seven years. Although this covers recent inflation, it is not enough to match the growing service needs and the associated costs. The ever-changing conditions have lead to many changes in policy:

- Hiring Freeze
- Overtime Budget Cut to Zero
- Travel Budget Cut to Zero
- Department Reductions
- Reduction of Staff
- Forced Layoffs

The city mangers needed to make the current staffing levels more efficient. The IT staff was made aware of the ODT VISION VRU from a referral from the City of Westerville. Any call answered by the VRU costs less then the same call answered by personnel, making services cheaper and more efficient. With a cheaper cost per call, the ROI expected is tremendous.

Which VRU to Go With

Middletown managers knew what they wanted to accomplish with the implementation of a VRU in various customer service applications. They had been given a good recommendation from the City of Westerville but looked at other vendors to gain a knowledge of what was available. Many of the units were prohibitive in cost and not even in the ball park as to what the tight budget would allow. The IT staff also wanted to do their own customization in house for any future applications.

The first major hurdle to cross was providing connectivity to the Unix type platform that the city's applications are based on. It had to be proven that the ODT VISION VRU could read/write to records provided in this "Universe" database which is a "Pick" look alike provided by Sanderson CMI.



Greg Parsons, "Budget cutbacks are so severe that our IT staff simply must help the City to find ways to help staff work more efficiently, which thereby improves customer service & reduces costs to Middletown residents."

Troy Anderton, programmer for the city, downloaded the ODT VISION demonstration software from the www.ODTVision.com web site. With the help of the ODT support staff, Troy was able to create a short test script including voice files. This routine was to test the connectivity of the ODT VISION unit and the ODBC link to the database. Troy created and compiled the script. The ODT VISION software allows a user to run a routine in the "test phone" mode. Troy's script requested a utility bill account number and the unit then found that number in the database and spoke the current balance. The connectivity issue was answered.

The next major issue to be addressed was "how does a caller in [Utility Billing](#) make a payment with a credit/debit card." The city had accounts with "Fifth Third Bank" and the ODT VISION VRU needed to write a record to a database file which would be sent to "Midwest Payment Systems", (subsidiary of Fifth Third) to clear the transaction. There would be four main results once this record was sent.

- [Bank transaction pending](#)
- [Bank link down](#)
- [Bank accepted transaction](#)
- [Bank rejected transaction](#)

Troy once again created a sample script to test this activity. When the caller requested a payment option, the script asked for a card number and verification information. A Microsoft Access record was then created. Troy created a Visual Basic program which read the new transaction record and sent it to the bank. If the bank link was down, the caller was told and the transaction was processed later. If the card is rejected, the caller could supply a different card. If the transaction was approved, the caller was given a confirmation number and the script wrote a credit to the utility billing database record. All transactions are also written to a log file within the ODT VISION VRU.

Even though Middletown was just in the information gathering

phase, the IT staff now had proof of how the bank process would work and a clear understanding of what needed to be done to connect to their database.

The final outstanding issue for the city to address was connection to the PBX phone system. Terry Rogers from ODT went to Middletown and interfaced a ODT VISION unit to their PBX to test the call transfer function. A side benefit of doing this initial testing is that Troy learned how easy it was to do his own customization in-house and became familiar with many of the features of the ODT VISION VRU. All capability issues were addressed and the city managers liked the pricing, features, scalability, and ease of customization. It was easy for the IT staff to make a decision with all outstanding issues answered.



Troy Anderton, "Development on the IVR system was quick and painless. Anyone with basic computer knowledge could write a script in short time. The data access method provided allows access to many different data sources at once, and speeds development time greatly."

THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX

Utility billing is just the start. Work is in progress for the building permits department for contractors to make inspection requests and check the status of recent inspections. Not only will this make that department more efficient, but provides customer service outside the normal 8-5 M-F business hours to meet the demand from contractors in the field. The cellular phone on the contractor's belt is now a terminal to the city's data.

In the future, the city hopes to implement the Municipal Court, Division of City Tax, emergency call outs, and a variety of other applications.

In Conclusion

The IT staff is meeting with other departments to see how the ODT VISION VRU can fit into various applications to automate functions, optimize personnel, build in logging & audit trails for quality control, and take applications to 24/7 support while reducing costs.

Middletown's function is to provide great service to their citizens which must be achieved even if the tax revenues have moderated. ■

Connecting your ODT VISION VRU to a Credit Card Clearance House

Middletown is using their ODT VISION VRU in "[Utility Billing](#)" for callers to make payments on their utility bills automatically on a 24/7 basis. We are seeing accounts use it to collect payments for a variety of applications such as:

- [Order Entry](#)
- [Insurance Policy Payment](#)
- [Accounts Receivables](#)
- [Fees and Invoice Payments](#)
- [Mayor's Court](#)

If a caller is in a shipment status application and finds the order is on "credit hold", the obvious next question is, "would you like to make a payment to release this order?"

The first question your firm needs to address is, will you be working with the bank that your accounts are at or some third party service. You can expect to pay a yearly or monthly connection charge, a per

transaction charge, and a non-swipe charge. Many third party clearance houses are now competing with banks which should lower the over all charges of these services.

Next we need to know how this service will receive the transaction. Some service providers provide live interactive connections such as the type Middletown is using while others establish batch processing. The logging feature of the ODT VISION can build a history of all transactions. If the credit/debit card transaction clears, your script needs to go into the application and credit the account for the payment received.

Benefits include instant access to funds, the lowering cost of collection, audit trails of activities, and improved customer service ■

Even With Price Increase, ODT VISION VRU Is Still Very Affordable

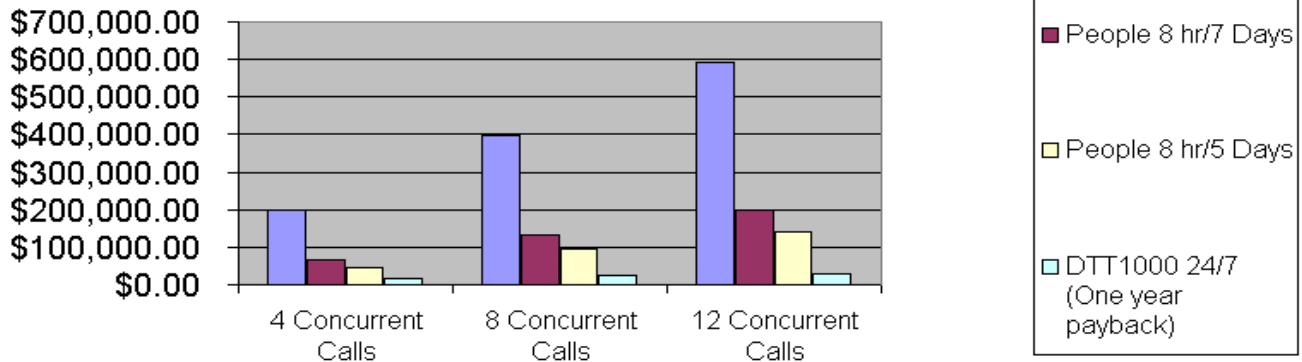
ODT VISION VRU vs. Live Personnel

Personnel costs are based on minimum wage with no benefits.

Not only does the ODT VISION VRU allow you to take your customer service function to 24/7 but it also provides customer service at a much cheaper cost per call than live customer service personnel. Additionally it allows you to optimize existing staff, forward information to personnel in the field, build audit trails of all activities, and can be customized around multiple system platforms and databases. The ODT VISION VRU will also allow multi-foreign language support.

Hours/Days for Customer Service	4 Concurrent Calls	8 Concurrent Calls	12 Concurrent Calls
People 24 Hr/7 Days	\$197,976.00	\$395,952.00	\$593,928.00
People 8 hr/7 Days	\$65,811.20	\$131,622.40	\$197,433.60
People 8 hr/5 Days	\$47,008.00	\$94,016.00	\$141,024.00
ODT VISION 24/7 (One year payback)	\$18,500.00	\$23,500.00	\$28,500.00

VRU vs. Live Personnel



ODT VISION Cost per call based on number of calls per day and number of lines in unit*

equipment/software cost per day	4 Line	8 Line	12 Line
200	\$16.89	\$21.46	\$26.03
300	\$0.08	\$0.11	\$0.13
400	\$0.06	\$0.07	\$0.09
500	\$0.04	\$0.05	\$0.07
600	\$0.03	\$0.04	\$0.05
700	\$0.03	\$0.04	\$0.04
cost per call	\$0.02	\$0.03	\$0.04

ODT VISION Cost per Day Amortized by Year and number of lines in unit *

Concurrent calls	24/7	4 Line	8 Line	12 Line
Cost per day for one year payback		\$50.68	\$64.38	\$78.08
Cost per day for two year payback		\$25.34	\$32.19	\$39.04
Cost per day for three year payback		\$16.89	\$21.46	\$26.03

* excludes phone line charges (after equipment is amortize, only phone line charges will be left.)

IBM recently published an article on their web site which quoted the cost of providing customer service.

Go to:

<http://www-1.ibm.com/businesscenter/us/enewsletter/enewsarticle.jsp?id=8823&ca=smbbiztrends110103&me=W&met=inli&re=SMBNewsTrends1>

Within this article, the IBM analyst said the cost of providing customer service with a live customer service representative is **\$7.00** per call, web is **\$2.50** per call and it is **\$1.00** via a Voice Response Unit **As you can see, the ODT VISION VRU provides and even more economical solution .** ■

Get Your Own Demo Today

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Columbus, Ohio 43235

Phone: 614-985-3814
Email: sales@ODT VISION.com



Go to www.ODT VISION.com to get your own demonstration of the ODT VISION Voice Response Unit which will run on any Windows based PC of Windows 98 or later with sound card and speakers. This is a simplistic order entry and shipment status system which is running off a Microsoft Access database. The demo is in the test mode and you will be using the "Test Phone" feature of the ODT VISION VRU to simulate a phone call to the data.

Improving Customer Service Affordability

Submit your technical questions or get free project analysis regarding your telephony application to:
TechSupport@ODTVISION.com
Or Call: 614-985-3814

HOW DO THEY DO THAT? "Building a log or audit trail"

Logging with the ODT VISION VRU

It is important to build a log which will reflect all activities of the ODT VISION VRU which allows you to make adjustments or follow up how your system is being used. Think backwards when building a log as to what information you want in a report. Some information you may want to track are number of calls, length of calls, area of system being accessed, variable values, users, and number of transfer out of IVR applications.

There are three methods to do logging and building of an audit trail on the ODT VISION VRU.

- Create a database record and write it to a database table
- Create a flat ASCII file which is comma delimited
- Use the ODT VISION System log file

Create a database record

The ODT VISION VRU System collects variable values which it remembers within the unit until that value is over-written or cleared. You will need to:

- Open the database record table with the proper index
- Insert the new record
- Update the database table to record variable values for the new record
- Close the Database

```
OpenDB teetime, "Name"
insertdb teetime
teetime.teedatetime = inputvardatetime
teetime.pr_name = name
teetime.streetaddress = address
teetime.cityaddress = city
teetime.phoneno = phone
teetime.creditcard = creditcard
teetime.tee_result = "Scheduled"
updatedb teetime
closedb teetime
```

Create a flat ASCII file which is comma delimited

In this method, we create a comma delimited file which can then be imported into a Micro or Host report generation program.

```
Open "custn.dat" for output as OSFile ; open the custn.data file
Output OSfile, calltype, Comma, ticketno, Comma, axtries,comma, menuinput, Comma, optninput, comma, faxstatus, Comma, faxno, Comma, Inspectiontype, Comma, Postdate, Comma, Calltran, comma, dtvar, Comma, LineNo ;write cutomer number
Close OSFile
```

*** Special note (Create an empty file 1st which the application write to.)

Use the ODT VISION System log file

In this method, the logging feature

must be turned on from the line setup screen under the log tab. You can select either "Circular" or "Date time stamped". This is also a comma delimited data file which can be imported into a Micro or Host report generation program.

```
x = date & ","
x = x & name
x = x & ","
x = x & Phone
x = x & ","
x = x & TName
x = x & ","
x = x & timemode
x = x & ","
x = x & address
x = x & ","
x = x & city
x = x & ","
x = x & state
x = x & ","
x = x & zip
x = x & ","
x = x & bullinput
x = x & ","
x = x & email
x = x & ","
x = x & appno
x = x & ","
log x
```

Building a variable which measures the length of the call

Many times it is important to know the length of the call. You simply need to record when the call started and when it ended and use the "Interval" command combined with the option of time units to have the VRU log the length of the call.

*** In this example, we are using the "uniquefile" command to set a control number, define the call time in seconds, and recording is using the system log file method.

```
Onhook ; IVR application hangs up the line
x = time; current clock time
varend = format x, "HH:NN:SS"
Varstart = Starttime ;value that call came in
CallLength = Interval varstart, Varend, "s" ;value of time difference in seconds"
Controlnumber = Uniquefile ;unique number for call for audit purposes
x = Controlnumber & ","
```