

THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX IN CUSTOMER SERVICE

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Is Your Supply Chain Too Rigid?

My father has always said, **“The definition of a successful company is a firm which succeeds in spite of itself.”** To be successful in today’s competitive marketplace, a firm must have a product that is at least a cut above the competition and in general; provide the customer an affordable option which addresses their needs. However, a good product and low cost are only two of the elements that will bring business your way. Outstanding customer service and whether it can bend to conform to client’s immediate needs is also a must in today’s successful supply chain model.

Is your Supply Chain Too Rigorous or Stringent?

“How would you feel if your largest customer called and told you that they were going to switch more of their business to a competitor? Their reason was that your supply chain is too rigid and they couldn’t schedule emergency service quickly enough. Further, their

Emergency!

Maybe you need someone to go hand pick the inventory and immediately deliver the item.

inability to get confirmation on replacement parts availability caused them to lose revenue and disappoint their customers. This is not an outlandish possibility in today’s “not now, NOW!” marketplace. Put simply, if your competitor is able to provide a more flexible supply chain and provide updates on their supply chain capabilities 24/7, they will get business even with an inferior product or service. Business that you can’t afford to lose.



“What if there was a way to change the constraints of your supply chain capabilities to enable your purchasing agents, your sales reps, service technicians, logistics providers and customers to collaborate and reach rapid consensus regarding the ability to successfully provide a particular supply/demand situation. Further, what if this capability extended three times your normal operating hours. Imagine proactive dynamic compilation of supply/demand and logistic situations to “flex” your supply chain capabilities. Imagine being able to on a 24/7 basis, check inventory, update shipping requirements or status, and place

an order over a phone (without turning on a computer or talking to a live attendant) and have it completely integrated with your supply chain and manufacturing systems so that it would automatically update the entire supply chain ...all in real time, regardless of whether you had access to the internet or not

Our DTT 1000 solution can give you the capability to “flex” your supply chain and much, much more.

You may have spent time and money in the development of a web solution for order entry where your clients could place orders 24/7. This may work extremely well when it is a standard order, but what if your customer has a critical mass type of situation. Lets say that we have a local family pizza shop, which, on Saturday afternoon, opens a bag of cheese and sees it is bad. Placing an order through a web interface, after hours and on the weekend just means the order would be posted and not fulfilled until Monday so the web is actually no solution to this emergency at all. What is

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actually needed is a way to place the order, but automatically notify an individual within your firm who is on-call to intervene and handle the situation by doing whatever is needed to fulfill the customer's request. This level of customer service may require

- that employee to go unlock a warehouse
- hand pick the items for the order
- run the order to the client's site with their personal car

..but remember, this is an emergency. Whether XYZ Pizza Shop will be in business tonight (*Saturday, the busiest night of the week*) depends on whether they have cheese or not. **Problems in customer service can actually turn you in to a champion in your customer's eyes. If you are able to handle the problem, you have risen above your competition and you may have a customer for life.**

Your persistence and resourcefulness in customer service will lead to a better scheme for your supply chain management. It is important to know your product, know your customers, and know the requirements of a successful supply chain scheme for your firm. Do as much homework about your customers and their needs as you can. One of the big questions in this analysis is.....**How do we handle business during office hours and how do we handle business outside normal office hours?**

Basically, we want to be the easiest people in the world to do business with. You really don't want your customer service to get in the way of people buying your product or service. During your normal office hours, a customer who has an emergency may need to breakout of the standard order routine to get a live customer service representative to handle the problem. Outside of business hours, there may be other ways to address this problem.

You really don't want your customer service to get in the way of people buying your product or service.

About eight years ago, we were having a brutal winter in the Midwest full of ice storms which seemed to be coming one right after the other. ODT was supplying a large dial-up network for a major national manufacture of automotive glass for their retail and wholesale customers. This dial-up network consisted of Andrew Network Product's Interlynx units (Protocol converters that allowed PCs with modems to dial into IBM AS400s which they got from ODT). People in the Midwest were finding ¼ to ½ inch of ice on their windshields each morning. They were literally taking hammers out to break the ice and as Paul Harvey would say, "you know the rest of the story". All of a sudden, sales jumped 5,000 % and a network that was sufficient normally had emergency capacity issues.

They needed forty more lines over-night. Normally we placed orders to Andrew through electronic means. The order got placed in an order queue, picked from inventory and shipped to us, which we then delivered to the client. I called my sales representative and with a special request. Ed, "you go to the warehouse, hand pick five units, place them on the shipment dock with labels and paperwork and get back to me with the Federal Express tracking number. I needed to inform the client that we could do this the next day as they requested. The Andrew's normal supply chain routine had to be broken to deal with the required order. Ed got back with me that this had been done and I informed my client. *Side note, this order was not delivered the next day as planned, (the only time I have seen FedEx fail). An ice storm hit their national distribution center in Tennessee and the plane was iced-in on a runway the next day.*



You need to have an exit strategy built into your supply chain management where clients' special needs can be addressed. This may consist of the transfer of the call to a live customer service representative, or if certain conditions exist, to the paging of an on-call person with recorded instructions of what action needs done. The ODT VISION VRU can be slid into your supply chain to provide this dynamic functionality. It can also build an audit trail of all activities so we can assure quality control for your customers' service issues.

Great customer service will mean a steady source of business during both good economic times and, more importantly, in downturns. To provide this, it is necessary to make sure your supply chain meets your clients' needs and that you can modify your systems as your business expands and changes. Outstanding customer service can give you a tremendous competitive edge.■

The ODT VISION Voice Response Unit is easy to customize and can be layered on top of your existing supply chain application with little or no programming changes to that system. This brings new flexibility to your customer service functions. The unit can be configured to know if your customer service department is open or closed. Problems outside of office hours or which meet certain criteria can be addressed as you desire. Please feel free to call us at 614-985-3814 or e-mail us at sales@ODT Vision.com to discuss your application and customer

Application In the Spotlight, Automated Response, "It's a good thing."

If you have ever changed your e-bay or paypal account, you received an automated response to the e-mail address which is tied to those accounts. This is just one form of automatic response and it is done to improve security to make sure you are the individual who is changing your profile information. The action was issued because a certain condition and changes existed.

Your firm may already have many reasons to issue automatic responses and you may not be utilizing this new trend for the improvement of your customer service areas.

Security

The example just given was for security purposes. We recently designed a medical record inquiry system where an e-mail was generated to the patient's e-mail account if an inquiry was made to their medical records.



Feedback

From an order entry system, you may want to send a report of not only the actual order details, but also additional information such as delivery date.

During the early 90's recession we had a food distributor who supplied restaurants. Off of their IBM System 38, a fax was generated which supplied order details including delivery information. Overnight, sales jumped 38%. I was amazed that a simple automated response could effect sales but the bottom line was.....

It was tough out there and the restaurants were ordering more from this distributor because they could be sure of their deliveries.

Daily Notification

From a production or delivery system, we create automatic e-mail messages or call-out voice messages to clients who have orders going into production or scheduled for today's deliveries. This is also an excellent way to inform your customers of current pricing. The ODT VISION "Control Window" feature is a scheduling utility which can assist you in this function.

Store Forward

One of the new requirements of HIPAA is for insurance firms which are TBA's to respond to a provider's procedure request within a 24 hour period. If this request comes in outside of business hours, we gather the information and automatically forward it to whoever is on-call. Another possible application is where in an emergency, the VRU records a voice-mail message and sends notification to someone to respond to the situation.■

ODT VISION VRU Does Not Become Obsolete

Why ODT VISION?

There are a few competitors to ODT VISION, but none of them can match us for flexibility, reliability, ease of use and cost.

Consider the following:

The ODT VISION connects to just about any PBX available, or can be connected to standard analog phone lines.

Some telephony systems require a separate set of digital lines to work. This may prevent you from transferring calls to your existing PBX. ODT VISION connects to standard analog phones lines

(POTS), and most digital PBX telephone systems trough analog lines.

It connects to almost any system or database available

Direct connection to an IBM iSeries/ AS400 is provided by "screen-scrape" technology, or via an ODBC connection. Connections to other Systems or Databases are performed by ODBC links, or by creating a custom interface. ODT VISION also has built-in Database support for stand-alone telephony applications where an existing system is not available. The ODT VISION also has built-in support for e-mail to allow outbound responses to users' needs.

It uses no "proprietary" parts

Our systems use industry standard Dialogic hardware available from many sources. Dialogic (an Intel company) has been the industry leader in telephony hardware for many years. Our systems are also based on industry standard rack-mount servers using no proprietary parts. Our software is loaded from a standard CD, using normal Microsoft Windows technologies and can be moved to new hardware & OS to prevent obsolescence. It can easily be moved to new hardware when available.■

Get Your Own Demo Today

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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. Manuals and case studies are also available on the web site.

Improving Customer Service Affordability

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

HOW DO THEY DO THAT? "Text to Speech" in the ODT VISION Release 6.0

Spell

Spell forces the voice to spell out all text supplied, letter by letter, rather than using its default word and sentence breaking rules, normalization rules, and so forth. All characters will be expanded to corresponding words (including punctuation, numbers, and so forth).

Words that contain punctuation, such as "U.S.A." will spell out the letters as well as the punctuation.

Example:

VoiceXML "Spell", TextIn.

VoiceXML types - Context

PartOfSpeech part, word

PartOfSpeech tells the voice what "part of speech" will be used to speak the supplied text. Use this tag to enable the voice to pronounce a word with multiple pronunciations correctly, when the pronunciation depends on its use. The PartOfSp tag cannot be empty.

Part is a string corresponding to a SAPI part of speech. Only SAPI defined parts of speech are supported - "Unknown", "Noun", "Verb", "Modifier", "Function", "Interjection".

Example:

VoiceText "Please "

VoiceXML "PartOfSpeech", "verb",
"Record"

VoiceText "this "

VoiceXML "PartOfSpeech", "noun", "Record"

; would say "Please record this record."

VoiceXML types - Context (date & times)

Date and time context specifies that the text passed to the engine is a date or a time.

Dates will generally have the format of:
number [delimiter] number [delimiter] number
or number [delimiter] number where the delimiter can be a ':', '/' or '-', and numbers are typically between 01 and 12 for months, and 01 and 31 for days. A year is generally a two or four-digit number.

Times will generally have the format of:
number [delimiter] number [delimiter] number
or number [delimiter] number where the delimiter is ':' or ':' or ':' and numbers are typically between 01 and 24 for hours and 01 and 59 for minutes and seconds.

When a zero is present in numbers between 01 and 09, the voice may ignore this, or normalize it as "oh". The voice may also place an "and" in the normalized time.

MDY value
date_mdy value

Example:

VoiceXML "MDY", "12/21/1999"

12/21/1999 will be normalized to
"December twenty first nineteen ninety nine"

DMY value
date_dmy value

Example:

VoiceXML "DMY", "21/12/1999"

21/12/1999 will be normalized to
"December twenty first nineteen ninety nine"

YMD value
date_ymd value

Example:

VoiceXML "YMD", "1999/12/21"

1999/12/21 will be normalized to
"December twenty first nineteen ninety nine"

YM value
date_ym value
Example:

VoiceXML "YM", "1999/12"

1999/12 will be normalized to
"December nineteen ninety nine"

MY value
date_my value
Example:

VoiceXML "MY", "12/1999"
12/1999 will be normalized to
"December nineteen ninety nine"

DM value
date_dm value

21.12 will be normalized to "December twenty first"

MD value
date_md value

Example:

VoiceXML "MD", "12/21"
12/21 will be normalized to "December twenty first"

Y value
YEAR value
date_year value

Example:

VoiceXML "YEAR", "2001"
2001 will be normalized to "Two thousand one"

time value

Example:

VoiceXML "time", "12:30"
12:30 will be normalized to "twelve thirty"

□