

The Recession, No End In Sight

Opinion by Terry J. Rogers (President Vision Voice Vantage, LLC.)

It doesn't look like the recession is ending any time soon. Is your firm doing everything it possibly can to survive and if possible, grow business? Have there been job reductions within your department or are they planned? The Federal Reserve recently made a little noticed, but astonishing announcement. In addition to the Federal Reserve projecting unemployment over 10% in the coming months, they also projected no net new jobs over the next five years. The old adage, "Doing More with Less" will be the montage banner of this decade. If you can't increase business, then you have to cut cost to maintain the bottom line. Progressive companies are now doing this. The elimination of jobs by our once standard corporate elite firms is everywhere. We all know about GM and the banking industry jobs but what you might not know is that IBM laid off over 18,000 people in February world-wide. I am constantly modifying my personal contact database to remove IBM representatives that are no longer there. This isn't surprising as IT sales are always slow in a recession and all the collected sales data on any item such as server sales reflect this. What IBM is doing, hunkering down for the long haul in order to survive, is being seen everywhere. Their more than projected profits recently reported are a reflection of IBM taking proactive steps to preserve their bottom line.

I as a small business owner, I am very alarmed by the anti-business policies that are now coming out of Washington but it isn't limited to just the federal government. Higher taxes & fees are coming at us from everywhere. While getting my business degree from Ohio State in the 70's, my HR courses covered the tradeoff

Federal Reserve

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where when you increase the minimum wage, a certain percentage of jobs will be lost. The new federal minimum wage increased to \$7.25 per hour on July 24th. While no one at Vision Voice Vantage gets minimum wage, I know this will affect many of our clients. It also drives up all wages when the minimum wage is increased. This could very well affect the number of employees that a firm may have. This is especially true if the business is fighting to stay afloat or is in a marginal vertical where there are so many different issues and external pressures to survive. The fact that an increase of the minimum wage has a direct effect on the number of jobs is a well know economic principle and is lost on Washington. It is coming with very bad timing due to the current recession, and so is the timing of any new taxes or fees on any business whether large or small. What effect that a new Health Care bill would have on businesses is also an unknown. The governmental policies need to focus on what it will take to stimulate business rather than methods and ways to derive more taxes and fees on these firms no mater what the size. If this downward spiral continues, there will be more lost jobs which are an extreme hardship on working families in our country. My Dad always had a saying, "A recession is when your neighbor has lost his job, A depression is when you have lost your job." We all pray that these business times will improve but until they do, good luck to you and your firm. Hope all improves soon. ■



Doing More With Less

It is obvious that most callers to your firm would rather talk with a live customer service representative than a machine. It is additionally clear that a VRU can always address the caller's request at a much reduced cost than if that same issue is handled by that live person. Finally, if the ODTVision VRU now manages the issue without the need for this live person, it frees up that staff for other duties that indeed require their attention therefore stretching your existing staff. It is also obvious that this is a method to utilize your exiting staff and do more for less. Cost savings may not only be your only reason to use the ODTVision VRU. Some of these reasons may be to extend the hours for support, address clients that you may have difficulty supporting such as those speaking foreign languages, supporting clients with special needs, or providing a method of self-service for clients that can not be supported through web or alternative methods of support.

What makes the selling and support of the ODTVision VRU so interesting is that our solution is used by so many different types of companies for a large variety of applications. We have clients in almost any vertical business category that you may think of. What we have noticed is a host of our clients are the **largest suppliers in their particular vertical market**. Our solution has been used by

- The largest close-out retailer in the country
- The largest veterinarian supplier in the country
- The largest wholesaler of beauty products in the country
- One of the largest family style restaurant chains in the country
- A number of large insurance companies

Now the question comes to mind, are these clients of ours the largest in their vertical because they use our telephony solution or is there something about our VRU solution that makes it so attractive to these firms? It is kind of like the age old question, "Which came first, the chicken or egg?" We don't necessarily look for large accounts. The answer to this question is that large firms that are really successful at what they do are so in part because they pay attention to customer service. It is paramount in their business strategy to pay attention to customer service, to always work to improve it, to make it fit their needs while

lowering the cost of doing so in order to enhance their bottom line. Therein lies the tradeoff. Obviously while any caller to a company would rather talk to a live person, it just isn't economical in these tough times. Call any major support line for any major player in any industry and chances are you will be initially talking with an automated attendant. That IVR application will try to handle your needs and will only pass the call to a live representative if your issues can not be addressed by that self-service solution. This approach is now filtering down to small firms that see what the large boys are doing and gain the understanding that it is efficient to use self-service solutions for everything possible. **It stretches your existing staffing and handles customer service more economically.** If your firm has a hiring freeze or limited personnel due to layoff, our VRU may be the answer to address those issues. What the ODTVision VRU represents to your firm is an affordable, easy to customize interface that enables in-house customization to form an IVR solution around your existing data and systems. There are two types of economic times that will increase our sales. One is when business is so good our clients can't hire people fast enough to handle all the customer service functions and the other where business is so bad that you can't afford the staffing required to do day to day business functions. Please feel free to contact us to see what we can do or to set up a demo. ▣

What is the ODTVision Solution?

ODTVision® for the **I5/iSERIES/AS400** is a revolutionary product that allows two-way telephone access to your **IBM I5/iSERIES/AS400 or Micro Database**. With **ODTVision®**, every touch-tone phone in the world becomes a remote terminal on your Data.

Although computer telephony systems have been available for a number of years, these systems have traditionally been expensive and not easily customized. **ODTVision®** addresses these issues by being the most versatile and inexpensive telephony solution available. Direct connectivity to the host in real time is not even an option for most telephony systems. With **ODTVision®**, not only is direct I5/iSERIES/AS400 telephony access a reality, but it comes with little or no modifications to your existing host display programs.

Vision Voice Vantage, Inc. is a certified ISV for IBM. Visit our web site on IBM.com at
<http://www-304.ibm.com/jet09002c/gsdod/solutiondetails.do?solutionId=25001&l>

How is the ODTVision Used?

Customers or sales staff will now be able to place orders, check status, and verify information from remote sites even after hours. Employees can securely verify benefits, enter payroll information, or check a message board from the road or from the comfort of their own homes. Operators or support personnel can be notified via phone or beeper of system problems that need immediate attention. These functions and many more can be provided 7 days a week, 24 hours a day without the expense of additional live personnel.

Customization Made Easy

Your own voice response applications can be created using the script compiler. ODTVision® uses an easy to learn "Basic" - like scripting language allowing you to quickly create your own voice applications from any display screen application from the I/SERIES/AS400 or linked micro databases.

The ODTVision Software is loaded on a PC linked to your I/SERIES/AS400 so development and testing can be done without disrupting the production data system. Outbound voice files can be recorded using a standard Sound Blaster card.

Features of the ODTVision Solution

ODTVision® is a Windows based telephony system that allows up to 24 simultaneous I5/iSERIES/AS400 users to access twenty four concurrent sessions per VRU. An unlimited number of ODTVision® VRUs can be used on an I5/iSERIES/AS400.

Validation information used by the **ODTVision®** system is supplied by your I5/iSERIES/AS400 by reading the information right off of the screens provided by your existing I/iSERIES/AS400 application using IBM Client Access. No modifications to your existing programs are required in most cases. Also, ODTVision® can use validation data files linked from your I5/iSERIES/AS400 or other database systems.

The ODTVision® can be linked to Microsoft Access and can import or export validation and transaction files from industry standard file formats that can be used by many Micro, Mid-Range or Mainframe applications. This includes data from the I/SERIES/AS400, dBase, Paradox, MS SQL Server,

and flat-ASCII files among others. **ODTVision®** supports Microsoft's Open Data Base Connectivity (ODBC) standard to allow attachment to existing "industry standard" databases. **Microsoft SAPI 5.1 standards for Text to Speech, TTS is also available as an option.**

Sample Applications

- ☎ Order Entry
- ☎ Transaction Confirmation
- ☎ Shipping Information
- ☎ Pricing Information
- ☎ Stock Availability
- ☎ Customer Inquiry
- ☎ Available Credit
- ☎ Information Hotline
- ☎ Offsite Payroll Input
- ☎ Employee Benefit Hotline
- ☎ Customer Response
- ☎ Automated System Operator
- ☎ Automated Paging & Email Delivery
- ☎ Fax Back Systems
- ☎ Query Reports On Demand
- ☎ Human Resource Support
- ☎ Warehouse & Logistics Support
- ☎ Automated notification to personnel in field
- ☎ Audit and Log trails of all activities



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Vision Voice Vantage, Inc.
200 East Campusview Blvd.
200
Columbus, Ohio 43235
3434323543235

Phone: 614-985-3814
Email: sales@ODTVision.com



THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX Get Your Own Demo Today

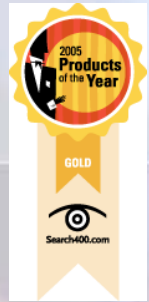
Go to www.ODTVision.com to get your own demonstration of the ODT VISION Voice Response Unit which will run on any Windows based PC of Windows 98 or later with sound card and speakers. This is a simplistic order entry and shipment status system which is running off a Microsoft Access database. The demo 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

Get free project analysis regarding your telephony application or submit technical questions at:
TechSupport@ODTVision.com
Or Call: 614-985-3814



IBM Solution Connection..
Integrates solution information with IBM eServer, software and TotalStorage technology



<http://www-304.ibm.com/jct09002c/gsdod/solutiondetails.do?solutionId=25001&l>

http://search400.techtarget.com/productsOfTheYearWinner/0,296407,sid3_gci1157611_tax302575_ayr2005,00.html

Where is the ODTVision Solution Going?

A number of years ago when Microsoft's Bill Gates was testifying when the government had raised anti-trust issues with Microsoft, Mr. Gates stated, "We are only as good as our next product ." That is true for any software company. You are only as good as your next release or next product. Even though our solution has won many prestigious awards in the past, such as the IBM magazine eserver's "Honor Roll award as well as well as Search400 product of the year in the "Business to Business Communication Category, we can't rest on our past recognitions and achievements. Our development team has always been responsive to the requests that come in from our existing clients. What I have always believed has made our solution so strong is that fact that the new features and improvements are implemented based upon client's requests.



When we were becoming IBM ISV certified a number of years ago the IBM committee that I

was meeting with was concerned when I kept talking about meeting standards imposed by Microsoft. The Microsoft side of our system has the elements and API's that are constantly changing. The HLAPI interface to the i5/series/AS400 that is provided for our clients that are layering the ODTVision over-top of legacy green screen applications and the direct connection to your files through an ODBC link has remained constant over the years even though we have changed from the use of NetManage's Rumba to IBM's own Client Access with our current release. What always changes are the elements within our solution that utilize Microsoft components. We are a long way from our original VRU unit that was a DOS based unit with a twinax emulation card that only supported 7 lines. Over the past two years we have totally rewritten our solution to support many new features and standards. Next month's newsletter will highlight what is contained in the new release, what has changed, and what is coming in future releases. We are very excited to announce these enhancements to our existing and prospective customers and look forward to continuing to supply the most affordable and most comprehensive telephony solution in the marketplace today. ■