Vision Voice Vantage, Inc.

THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX IN CUSTOMER SERVICE

I don't receive Health Benefits, You don't have to pay FICA, nor do I Take Days Off

Inside this issue:

But We Have Always Done It This Way

In the early 80's the Ohio State University College of Engineering and the College of Business invited Rear Admiral Grace Hopper to campus to speak. As an alumni of the Business School, I was invited to attend this presentation and jumped at this opportunity to hear this remarkable pioneer of our industry.

Rear Admiral Grace Hopper was a computer scientist, a famous US Navy Officer who was one of the first programmers on the Harvard Mark 1 Computer, and she developed the first compiler for a programming language. She conceptualized the idea of machine-independent programming languages and is considered the Mother of COBOL. She is credited with popularizing the term "debugging" for fixing computer glitches. During her speech she told of an actual moth in the electronics of the Mark 1 and that is where the term debugging came from. Many of our modern computer trends and technologies are a direct reflection of her work. She was this little framed woman who worked at a time where the field was totally dominated by men, and whose work had a dramatic effect. Even though she was in her 80's she was full of energy and an inspirational speaker. She

died in 1992 and is honored by a US Navy destroyer USS Hopper (DDS-70) named for her.

As an entrepreneur, I have always had a little independent way to view things. It goes with the territory. If you look at the main title of this publication it is "Thinking Outside the Box In Customer Service." The very purpose of this monthly newsletter it to get you to think of new possibilities. Grace Hopper's presentation left a lasting remembrance that I will always carry with me. Now one of the first topics that the Rear Admiral covered was a story of how a new employee within her department would view the wall clock. You see, Hopper didn't use a standard wall clock, hers ran backwards. She stated that the employee would always say, "I can't tell what time it is." She used the clock to make a point. She proclaimed, **"I never want to ever hear you say, ….But I always have done it this way."** Once she got that point across, the

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new employee would start to be able to tell time with this clock.

Of course, Hopper's statement brought a laugh but it lends it's way to her primary philosophy….embrace change and always allow the possibility that there might be a better way.

That leads to her next topic, be able to justify your change. You need to define the change compared to the way it is currently done and explain that. She told a comic story that they needed to add staffing. She went to a presentation for that need to the U.S. Joints Chief of Staff. Hopper pointed out that she was a bit nervous as this was her first time in front of this elite council. She made her case for the additional staffing and then asked for twenty thousand dollars at which the entire committee burst out laughing. Horrified at the response, Hopper asked the Admiral who escorted her into the chamber as they left, "What had she said that was so funny?"...he explained, "Twenty Thousand,…. no one goes before the Joint Chiefs unless they are talking twenty million."

The final talking point that I remember from Hopper's presentation regarded asking permission for the change. Perhaps it was that she worked with so much bureaucracy in the Navy combined that computer trends were moving so fast but she truly embraced what now has became the Nike slogan, "Just Do It". She emphasized that if you truly believe the change is beneficial, justified, and it is going to take longer to get permission than to do it, Just do it. Realize if it fails it will be on your shoulders but as Hopper pointed out, "Most likely the new application will be working and successful before you could even get permission. I have seen this in real life. A number of years ago I
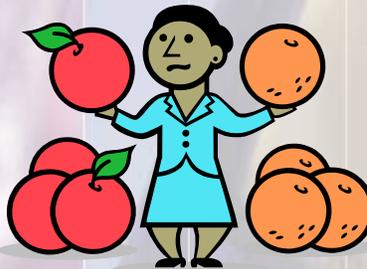
had a proposed project at a Fortune company that was just totally over analyzing the project. We had multiple meetings to review the project where there were about 15 associates in attendance. Many of these were at the Vice President level. I was informed that they were still looking at 16 vendors during the fourth meeting. At that point I stated, "You could have already had our solution working in beta test mode and defining the application for less money than the cost of your study of this project". It is time to move forward". Just do it.◘

Built in Consultant For Your Project

ODT VISION® for the **I5/iSERIES/AS400** is a revolutionary product that allows two-way telephone access to your **IBM I/I5/ISERIES/ AS400 or Micro Database.** With **ODT VISION® , every touch-tone phone in the world becomes a remote terminal on your data**. This solution allows the end-user to create their own IVR telephony applications. Most clients come to us with a need. Sometimes they may be replacing an existing VRU doing IVR applications or this may be a totally new method to provide some form of self-service customer service functionality.

Generally, clients select us for our affordability, scalability, easy of customization, and methods to interactively connect to real-time data. What may not be apparent initially is that the client is also getting a "Built in Consultant" who is a resource in the design and building of the base application. This is an

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inherit benefit of the way we create the base application with the clients. The mere fact that we do this with all types of clients mean we bring previous experience with almost any type of application or vertical marketplace.

Think of Making the Application Easy for the User

The very nature of IVR applications is that they are designed so the user is prompted with simple voice banners and they input simple data which is used to navigate through the application without assistance. This begins with defining the user and their needs. The user may need the application to be in a non-English language such as Spanish. The application should never be too complex and should use terminology and vocabulary that the user can understand. A first time user needs to be able to use the IVR solution or it is of no benefit. If your telephony application requires security, you need to allow the caller to use a User Id and Security Pin to gain access. You should never ask the caller something they do not know.

Now is a good time to review the seven usability issues that all IVR applications designs should consider. We have all done it before; dialed in to a voice response unit which is more of an aggravation than a help. It is important in the design of your applications to take a few steps to improve the ease of use for your callers.

Seven things that should always be considered in an IVR self-service solution

Can not transfer out to a live representative

The number one complaint against most VRU routines is the lack of ability to transfer out of the exiting path to a customer service representative. Always build an exit strategy within your program that allows the caller to transfer to a live customer service representative during office hours, leave voice mail outside of office hours, or play a voice banner which gives the caller another phone number to call for additional assistance. The ODTVision has simple setup screens that allow you to configure how the system will respond if the office is closed for a holiday, on certain days of the week, or outside of normal office hours. All one must do in their self-service script routines is to look at what has been defined as hours of operation and also look at whether today's date is selected as a holiday or is marked as a special company closure day.

Help, I'm in a continuous loop

Almost as aggravating as not being able to transfer to a live person is to be caught into a loop where you can only resolve it by hanging up. Always build in a backup step in the menu to go to the previous menu or the main menu. A caller may find out that the retrieved information causes them to need to take some other action. If that occurs, make sure you have built logic in the script to address these needs.

This Menu is too complex

Never make a menu with more than five items. It is better if you create sub-menus with branches to return to previous menus. If there are too many items in a menu, the caller will forget what is available by the time they get to the last item. You may also consider replaying the menu upon the caller entering a prompt or if no data is entered after a certain amount of time.

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Voice prompt keeps playing

If the caller hears what they are looking for or they use the system a lot, they will key the menu option once it is heard. Place in your script the option to discontinue the playing of the voice file once any key is pressed. This will allow the user to move through the system faster without having to hear every voice file prompt in its entirety. Optimize the order of the voice file prompts in the menu to also speed the caller's progress.

Golden rule, "Don't ask caller for something they don't know"

This is one of the most important rules of all. If the person calling in to check the status of their shipment doesn't know their tracking number, ask them for the phone number they used when the order was placed. Read back the most recent order that used this phone number. That is probably the one they are looking for.

I don't know the logic of the routine or what data is allowed

The ease of use in some complex routines where a lot of data is going to be entered can be made easier if the user knows what

information is expected. An example of this might be an open enrollment application in insurance. In this example, the user just wants to go into one item in the open enrollment application and change that item instead of answering questions for each item (Item 23, change family dental deductible...values allowed $200, $500, $1000). Additional assistance could come from an instruction form which contains a number for each question and the values allowed for that question so that they can be selected on the form before the user calls in. These instructions need to be made available to all potential users.

Build a log of usage

Your telephony system should be dynamic where it is always changing to improve the customer service function. It seems to be a second thought in the design and planning of a new application to build a log file which will show an audit trail of how your users are using the system. By monitoring their use, you can refine the application to be a better self-service solution.

By following these simple general rules, you can build the best IVR solution possible. Use us as a resource to do that.◘