Vision Voice Vantage, Inc.

THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX IN CUSTOMER SERVICE

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Using a VRU self-service solution in-house to improve customer service

Customer service is always a balancing act where you are trying to have the correct number of live customer service representatives to provide the required timely response to user's needs. It is the job of management to seek an efficient staffing level and still maintain an economical approach for providing that support. A firm must always analyze the number of calls, length of calls, and wait time that callers are waiting in a holding queue before a live representative takes the call. These initial questions are always used in the determination of your staffing requirements.

A number of years ago I was in front of a Fortune company discussing an IVR application that was going to be used by both customers and that firm's employees. The firm had already looked at the application as it was currently being addressed with live customer service representatives. In the research of the project, there was an obvious issue where the employees calling into the live representatives had a familiarity with the staff. Although they were told to keep the conversations to business only, there was a lot of chitchat communications going on between the employees that was not business related. Now hearing what you

did over the weekend or plans for this evening may be fun,…..it wasn't the best use of that live representative's time and it extended the length of the call. I asked the obvious questions, "Do you want that paying customer to be on hold while the customer service representative is gossiping with a fellow employee?" I was told that the firm had strongly suggested to their employees that their info calls to the customer service department should only be business related,….it was still happening. I suggested that they remove the employees from using the live customer service representative and the employees only use the IVR self-

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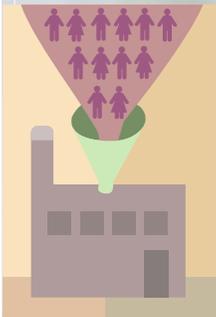with IBM eServer, software and
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service application therefore freeing up the live customer service representatives. Even without adding live customer service representatives, the firm could lower the possible hold time by reducing the number of calls each representative needed to address. This is like an increase in staffing at minimal cost.

Most of the time, you think of IVR self-service application as a solution to address external users. Those users may be customers or have 3rd party relationships with a firm. Not all users are external and you may want to consider a self-service application to address needs of employees to improve communications in-house while reducing cost to provide that information. This month's newsletter is going to review how some of our clients have used their IVR application to address needs of in-house personnel.

Human Resources

Perhaps there is no greater communication need for an employee and the firm they work for than interchange of information between them and the HR department. One of our clients is a large city school   district that has hourly employees call into their IVR application to report that they are on the clock or off the clock.

It made sense to use the IVR as it provided:

☎ The ability for hourly employees to call in from various buildings throughout the city where the only equipment required was a standard phone and that phone's CallerID provided proof of location

☎ If this employee did various classes of jobs, the amount of time logged could be assigned to the proper account

☎ The HR department now had hours directly reported to the HR systems for payment and record of all activities

☎ If a critical employee is missing from their assignment, corrective action can be taken by management to fulfill this function
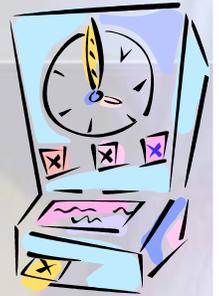
Every HR department needs a system for employees to call in to report they are going to be absent or tardy to their shifts. This call need to be tied directly to that personnel's records as the employee may need to take vacation days, personal days or may even get a warning that they have missed too much work which needs to be documented. This call may come outside the HR business hours so the automation of this process through an IVR application is ideal.

The HR department may create a multifunctional Employee hotline where a variety of functions may be addressed like:

☎ Open enrollment

☎ Vacation scheduling

☎ Retirement accounts

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A number of years ago a major university came to us to set up an employee verification system that was automated to run 24/7. This means for example if an employee was at a car dealership after hours and wanted to start the paperwork for that car loan, an automatic self-service solution was in place to do that which was secure and worked directly with that employees personnel records.

Job Scheduling & Reporting

Whenever there are employees in the field addressing job assignments at client's sites, there needs to be a way for that employee to report back to the central office what has been accomplished, report issues/problems, and get assignments to move onto the next job. This job assignment may be outside normal business hours but that doesn't mean the central office can not be informed. Through the creation of a self-service IVR application, the employee's cell phone can now be a terminal to report all activities. Of all the clients that I have seen do this type of function, the most bizarre was a large cemetery that was having grave diggers report the opening and closing of graves.

Warehouse and logistics support

One of the major problems in all transportation is that the time frame of shipments is subject to external elements such as traffic, construction, and possible breakdowns. A truck driver over the road needs to be able to notify the central office not only if the delivery has been accomplished but also any elements that are affecting their job assignment. In addition, the received dock is such a limited resource which is shared by multiple load deliveries, the driver also needs to be able to modify and schedule their appointments via their cellular phone. There are a hoard of possible application in transportation.

Inventory

An employee in the field needs to be able to communicate with a customer they are with the up to the minute pricing and availability of an item. If this is fluid, it is very easy to turn that salesman's cell phone into a terminal back to the inventory system. At the same time, the employee could inform that customer the status of any previous orders or address any of their client's needs.

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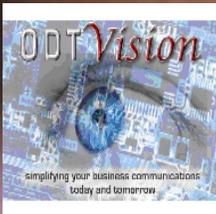
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Posting Information

We have seen everything from convenience stores reporting tank levels and cigarette counts to in-house security guards walking around a campus environment where they use the phone of the area to report that area checked. If the employee is mobile and has info to post, you might want to consider an IVR application to communicate with your staff.

Activating or Deactivating

A number of years ago we were working with the largest cable company in the country on a system to allow their support personnel to install a new cable box, and then activate it. Pretty standard stuff now, but at the time, it was revolutionary. This brings up the point that people in the field could control any device or account to turn it on or off.

Notification or On-Call

When a situation arises outside business hours, systems need to be in place to address what is needed. As an outgoing contact, the IVR application may monitor the host and notify the employee that is on call when the situation arises or this outbound contact may begin with a user making a request after hours. Built within the application may be the ability of the employee once contacted to take some action through the VRU. This whole process allows the handling of emergency or after hours situations without live staffing at the corporate office. Within this approach could also be routines to han-

dle events on the host system that require human attention.

Report Generation on Demand

It is easy to build query reports on the host system that can be recalled where variables used to build the report can be inserted and then the reports generated and sent. It is easy to use an automated IVR self-service application to initiate a report type and then send it out. Once again, a salesman may be in front of a client that makes a request and the employee says, "let me get that for you." This salesman then just uses his cellular phone as a terminal to make that report request. Happy customer and instant response.

In conclusion, there are all types of information that needs to flow between a firm's employees and the various departments within a firm. There is always a cost in this communication but that channel cost for information flow can be lowered when it is automated. There are additional benefits as these functions now are handled on a 24/7 basis and at a reduced cost. It also allows other firm's staff that were addressing the needs of the employees to be freed up to address the needs of paying customers. This very approach will stretch your existing staffing while improving lag times that a customer may be on hold.

Look at your possible applications and let us know about your needs. The various applications stated in this newsletter came from real client applications so we can help.◘

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