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The AI-powered contact centre, part 2: Achieve superior self-service voice support

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To meet rising customer expectations, modern interactive voice response (IVR) systems must offer intelligent self-service and seamless agent escalation when needed. We look at the vital role of conversational IVRs in the digital contact centre, and how the Microsoft Digital Contact Centre Platform helps organisations engage customers in their channel of choice while increasing self-service.

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Many people still prefer to pick up the phone when they want to access customer service. Many others find that the phone is a vital last resort when they fail to get answers in digital channels. Regardless of why people call a contact centre, it is essential that the experience is fast, simple, and satisfying.

In this article, we'll look at how the Microsoft Digital Contact Centre Platform brings together Nuance and Microsoft innovations to help organisations engage customers efficiently and effectively in the voice channel—from the moment they reach the interactive voice response (IVR) system.

Reimagining the voice channel

Most IVRs make customers navigate a maze of menu options and listen to irrelevant messages because they lack the intelligence to resolve inquiries themselves. They frustrate customers, who have learned to keep pressing '0' or shout "Agent!" to reach a human agent who has no knowledge of what happened during the IVR session. That forces the customer to restart their search for a satisfactory resolution. These

can be frustrating–even infuriating– customer experiences, which can damage brand loyalty.

With a conversational IVR, however, callers can explain their needs in their own words and get answers to questions in a few seconds.

Conversational IVRs use natural language understanding (NLU) to interpret what callers want to accomplish and resolve their issues in a fast, satisfying self-service experience. Of course, some interactions will require a live agent (like complex queries, sensitive issues, or high-value transactions), so AI-powered IVRs route those calls to an available agent with the right skill set.

The best conversational IVRs can recognise thousands of complex instances of customer intent from customers' natural spoken words, tone, and patterns; dramatically improving the customer experience. For example, when the health insurance company Humana replaced its legacy system with a conversational IVR, its Net Promoter Score (NPS) rose by 80%.

Making customer experiences better

Modern IVR solutions give callers intelligent, seamless, conversational self-service experiences that lead to faster resolutions, increased customer satisfaction, and lower service costs.

The most advanced IVR systems can improve customer experiences in many ways. They can offer callers the option to shift to digital experiences such as a virtual assistant or live chat to get faster service—while maintaining context throughout the engagement. They can also integrate with call-back management systems, so when wait times are long, the IVR gives customers the option to be called back rather than waiting in line.

On the Microsoft Digital Contact Centre Platform, conversational IVRs can create even more value for customers—and for organisations—by uniting Microsoft and Nuance innovations. When the IVR escalates an engagement to a live agent, it can hand over the full context of the conversation. The agent desktop can also pull in a unified view of the customer, including previous interactions, purchase history, and more. Agents feel empowered to quickly address queries and issues, increasing their productivity, while the customer feels understood and valued.

Intelligent routing means happier, more loyal agents

Conversational IVRs can handle most routine inquiries and even more complex interactions, increasing call containment and minimising transfers to agents. When transfers are needed, agents have a clear view of the context of incoming calls and can serve customers more effectively. And because agents are no longer handling routine interactions, they can apply their skills to higher-value, more rewarding engagements, which in turn increases agent experience and loyalty.

For example, at a major global telco, a conversational IVR successfully handles more than 70% of the 4 million calls it receives each month, reducing the strain on the organisation's live agents.

On the Digital Contact Centre Platform, IVRs use intelligent routing to further increase the ability of agents to resolve most incoming calls successfully and swiftly. The real-time data and context from the IVR enhance call handling by intelligently routing callers to the live agent best suited to help, while providing them with the information needed to provide rapid, reliable resolution. That leads to higher customer and agent satisfaction as well as a significant reduction in contact centre costs.

Faster, more secure interactions

One of the most valuable developments in modern IVR technology is the addition of biometric authentication. Voice biometrics technology in Nuance Gatekeeper can accurately identify customers (and fraudsters) based on more than 1,000 characteristics of their "voiceprint" using only half a second of their natural speech.

Authenticating callers using voice biometrics increases security (because PINs and passwords can be easily bought or stolen) and eliminates the need for agents to spend time on lengthy, often tedious knowledge-based authentication processes. It also enables deeper level of personalisation. By seamlessly authenticating a caller in the IVR with voice biometrics, a conversational IVR can use existing data sources to understand the caller's relationship with the brand, past history, and other data points to personalise the experience. One of the world's largest asset managers uses passive voice biometrics to authenticate 79% of customers as they speak with its conversational IVR. By automating the caller authentication process, the contact centre reduced the average handle time for each call by 82 seconds because agents no longer have to begin every interaction by verifying the caller's identity.

Intelligent IVR applications for every need

The Microsoft Digital Contact Centre Platform makes it easy to build an enterprise-grade, secure, conversational voicebot or FAQ application for the IVR that can handle everything from straightforward queries to complex interactions. What's more, these applications will be purpose-built to meet specific requirements and business goals.

Organisations can build DIY voicebots in Nuance Mix (more on that in our next article) or call on the expertise of Nuance's professional services teams, speech scientists, data scientists, and conversational

design specialists. And as the Digital Contact Centre Platform continues to evolve, organisations will be able to build voicebots with Power Virtual Agents, then enhance and evolve those bots with Nuance Mix.

Defining the future of voice support together

By bringing together Nuance Conversational IVR and Mix, Power Virtual Agents, and Dynamics 365 Customer Service, along with Microsoft Azure Communications Services and Azure Cognitive Services, organisations now have a single platform to create innovative customer and agent experiences.

For example, organisations can build bespoke, enterprise-grade applications using highly intelligent call routing capabilities in Dynamics 365; or create smart, personalised, empathetic, and natural IVR and bot applications with Azure Cognitive Services. It is now possible to turn those innovative "what if?" customer service ideas into reality. And, of course, it is all possible while protecting your current investments thanks to, backwards compatibility and a clear, disruption-free migration path to any future solutions.

Next steps

Next time, we will dive deeper into how Nuance Mix—Nuance's conversational AI tooling platform—complements Power Virtual Agents. Until then, learn more about the Microsoft Digital Contact Centre Platform and how to create engaging, personalized digital experiences.

Tags: Microsoft + Nuance, Microsoft Digital Contact Centre Platform

More Information

The Microsoft Digital Contact Centre Platform

Discover how Nuance, Dynamics 365, and Microsoft Teams could shape the future of your contact centre.

Learn more

About Tony Lorentzen

Tony has more than 25 years of experience in the technology sector, spending the last 17 with Nuance where he is currently the SVP of Intelligent Engagement Solutions within the Enterprise Division. Before that he served as the leader of several teams at Nuance including Sales Engineering, Business Consulting, and Product Management. A proven leader in working with the cross-functional teams, Tony blends his in-depth knowledge of business management, technology and vertical domain expertise to bring Nuance's solutions to the Enterprise market, partnering with customers to ensure implementations drive true ROI. Prior to Nuance, Tony spent time at Lucent and Verizon where he led teams that applied the latest technologies to solve complex business issues for large enterprises. Tony received a B.S. from Villanova University and a MBA from Dowling College.

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