

Customer engagement, Voice & IVR

Advance your IVR to the Final Four

[Nuance Communications](#)

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The Final Four is officially here, and the top 4 teams made it through multiple challenges to get here and are ready to see who is number 1. And just like this major basketball tournament, customer service all boils down to your customers successfully navigating your inbound support channels to reach their goal. Read on for four strategies to ensure your company's Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system reigns victorious.

The NCAA Tournament Final Four is upon us! Brackets have been busted. Office pools across the country are ruined. And that guy in accounting who picks teams based on their mascot is the only one happy. The basketball teams themselves – Michigan State, Auburn, Texas Tech, and Virginia – are excitedly preparing for their big weekend in Minneapolis.

Some teams' paths to the Final Four were tough with many close calls. Others had more comfortable wins along the way. Either way, all the teams excelled and there are 60 other teams who didn't quite have the right stuff to make it all the way to the end. The Final Four teams all did a few things well and knew how to navigate the pitfalls.

Callers to your company's Interactive Voice Response (IVR) may sometimes feel like they are embarking upon their own tournament bracket with each call. Callers must work their way through a maze of menus to reach their end goal. When your IVR greets callers, their personal "bracket" is established. Can they navigate easily to what they want – i.e. the Final Four or championship game? Or do they have to work their way through a challenging maze of menus and complicated commands?

Simplifying your callers' IVR bracket

Innovations in today's IVR technology make it possible for customers to easily engage your contact center and reach their desired destination with fewer steps and greater satisfaction. Let's see how we can work our way through four tournament-tested strategies and beat back the opponents getting in the way of IVR success.

1. Personalize the greeting

It's tip-off time. The first game is on and a customer contacts your IVR. A good start is crucial for both basketball teams and an IVR experience. How does your IVR greet your callers? Is it a long, canned message advising them to "Listen carefully because the menus may have changed" and instructing them to "Push 1 for Sales, Push 2 for Service," etc.? Any referee would call foul on this approach!

If this is the face your company shows to customers, then you are missing out on great advances to create a more welcoming experience.

How about greeting your callers by name?

How nice would it be for a caller to hear "Hello, Sue. Welcome back" when they are a returning customer dialing into your IVR? Personalized greetings are possible using caller ID technology known as Automatic Number Identification (ANI). ANI matching lets your IVR connect to existing customer phone numbers, match that number to your CRM system and identify the caller's name. Then [Text-to-Speech technology](#) converts names into a personalized greeting for each caller.

2. Use voice authentication, and send PINs to the bench

We're further into the tournament now, and the IVR must validate that you are who you say you are. Typically, this requires entering PINs or passwords. Sometimes you can't enter your PIN, forget your password, or can't remember the exact answers to your security questions. If you can't easily confirm your identity, you could be stuck in a long loop of transfers or be blocked from your account.

What if authentication was as easy as speaking into the phone? No passwords or PINs to remember – just confirming your identity by the sound of your voice.

[Voice biometrics](#) creates a unique voiceprint for each customer that is as individual as their fingerprint. Callers can validate themselves with a short vocal passphrase such as "At Nuance, my voice is my password". Using voice as authentication eliminates the need to remember PINs, passwords, or the answers to security questions (which require an average of 23 seconds of interaction with a live agent – adding time to the call and souring customers' experience).

Customers want this technology. Ninety percent of users prefer voice biometrics over the status quo. Implementing voice biometrics will excite your customers while driving results against your key metrics – making you feel like you hit the long three-pointer to win the game.

3. Let your customers use natural language

Why not let your callers speak in their own words? Advances in [Natural Language Understanding \(NLU\)](#) allow your IVR to understand not just the words that are said, but their intent – and that makes all the difference when it comes to getting callers to the right content.

IVRs that use natural language are more personal, intuitive, and welcoming. We've had customers see a 45 percent reduction in call volume, 90 percent fewer escalations, and a 53 percent drop in non-compliance. That, as they say in basketball, is a "triple-double".

4. Multi-channel integration

There's one more opponent to vanquish until we're at the Final Four. Now is the time to utilize all possible strategies. Now is the time for multi-channel integration.

The days of customers only calling the contact center or hitting your IVR are long gone. In fact, today most customers begin their self-service journey on your website, shifting to the IVR when they can't find the answer they need. A modern IVR system will connect the dots, capturing the data and prompting the customer with an appropriate path. For example, "Hello Mrs. Smith. I see you recently accessed your account statement online. Are you calling to pay your bill?"

Unfortunately, older, stand-alone IVR systems can't make these connections. Today's forward-looking organizations see the value in all channels working together cohesively – just as all five players on the court must be a part of one team.

Cut down the nets! Victory achieved

We're at Minneapolis! We took our IVR game to the next level through these strategies and helped people navigate their own personal IVR "bracket" and propel them directly to their end goal – the Final Four. All that's left to do is to ask the local fortune teller if Texas Tech can pull off the upset.

Tags: [Speech recognition](#), [Customer experience](#)

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