

Customer engagement, Voice & IVR

IVRs and AI, unite!

[Nuance Communications](#)

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While IVRs have been invaluable in reducing contact center costs, we need to be honest: not many are delivering experiences that live up to consumer expectations. It's no surprise given the rise of digital—which led many organizations to abandon focus and investment in their IVR in favor of mobile, websites and social channels.

But digital hasn't killed the IVR—it's just pushing it to be better. Customers expect the same seamless, intuitive experiences they get in the digital world everywhere they engage your organization—especially in the IVR. The phone is more important than ever for your customers: it's an escalation point if digital channels don't deliver what they need, it's the go-to channel for anyone 'on the go' and can't easily navigate a website or an app, and it's the top spot for complex or sensitive issues that require human assistance.

So, at your customers' critical moments of need, are they greeted by an outdated touch-tone phone system from 1998 with awkward menu options? Or an intuitive, conversational and effortless experience that quickly gets them exactly what they need?

Four AI solutions for a modern IVR

We've identified four key principles that are central to a truly great caller experience. Each one involves the power of artificial intelligence (AI). AI is a key to reinventing IVR because it moves it beyond simple voice recognition to a deeper level of understanding and interaction.

1. Create an intuitive, personalized first point of contact

Imagine if you and your closest friends had to re-introduce yourselves every time you met. Or every time you ordered a coffee from your local barista, you had to verify your identity. It sounds ridiculous—but that's basically what outdated IVRs are putting even your most loyal customers through.

There are far better ways to offer personalized first contact experiences. At the simplest level Automatic Number Identification (ANI) eliminates caller identification prompts completely. Instead, your IVR automatically identifies inbound phone numbers and matches them against your customer data to work out who's calling before the interaction even begins. Sounds easy, but many organizations haven't taken the time to do this most basic step.

There's also a far better way to handle authentication painlessly: voice biometrics. Companies such as [Barclays](#), T-Mobile and Vanguard are already using this technology to replace old fashioned passwords and PINs.

Here's how it works: with voice biometrics, your voice is your password. The IVR automatically verifies your identity by comparing your voice against a "voiceprint" you created during a simple one-time setup process. It's not just a more pleasant experience—it's far more efficient and secure. On average, organizations have seen call durations shortened by an average of 42 seconds, freeing up agents to spend time on more complex issues.

Combining both ANI matching and [biometric authentication](#) will make your IVR a joy to call.

2. Deliver natural, conversational interactions

Talking to an IVR isn't new. For years, customers have been able to speak a word or two to make a menu selection or get to an agent. But the IVR typically relied on the caller repeating a pre-programmed set of words—not asking questions or exchanging dialog.

Those kinds of one-way interactions don't cut it anymore, especially with today's home assistants and smart speakers. Today's callers expect your IVR to listen and respond to natural dialog as if they're talking to a human. And, thanks to huge breakthroughs in AI and NLU, today's modern IVRs can:

Case in point: Amtrak

1. Infer intent and ask questions
2. Understand next steps
3. Recognize the unrecognizable
4. Predict and anticipate
5. Remember critical information

Basically, they can have a real, two-way conversation. A true dialog with your customers without having to master a crazy menu prompt. Imagine your callers being greeted with "Hello Bob, thanks for calling. How can I help you today?" and then the IVR helping resolve the issue. You can almost feel the customer satisfaction growing.

3. Anticipate your caller's needs

We don't call a company because we are looking to talk with someone. We call with questions. And we want to spend as little time as possible on the phone. Forward-thinking companies are using the latest advances in AI and predictive capabilities to better anticipate why customers call and get them to the right resolution faster.

Putting AI to work in the IVR enables organizations to predict the reason for a call and then automatically deliver an experience that is hyper-personalized – tailored just for them, based on their unique situation and past history.

Suppose a cable subscriber spends time researching programming packages before calling. The IVR can recognize that activity and greet the caller with a personalized message: "I see you were browsing cable packages online earlier today. Are you calling to add a station or change your programming lineup?"

By analyzing information such as browsing and interaction history and past transaction data, you can

anticipate customer needs before they even say “hello.” And the best IVRs don’t just resolve the customer’s issue more effortlessly; they recommend the right next step for every customer, too. Imagine the satisfaction you can deliver if the IVR call speeds resolution faster and allows callers to get back on with their day.

4. Connect your IVR and digital channels

Companies with the strongest omni-channel customer engagement strategies retain an average of 89 percent of their customers, compared to only 33 percent for companies with weak strategies. Why? Because 60 percent of customers visit your website before calling your IVR, and 36 percent continue to browse your website while talking to a

representative. Wherever they start their journey, they expect to authenticate once, then move seamlessly between channels to get the answers they need.

An IVR-to-digital solution can reduce your contact center costs, improve customer satisfaction, and optimize channel engagement by allowing customers to transfer seamlessly from your IVR to text messaging, a virtual assistant or a live chat agent. Many customers prefer these anyway, and they offer significant cost savings—making it a win-win for your callers and you.

So how does it work? Imagine a customer calls with a pre-sales question about a new product they’re considering. Here, the IVR offers them a choice:

“No problem, I can have a live agent help you with that—the wait time is just five minutes. Or you could chat with an agent right now via text message. Would you like to chat instead?”

Many times a customer will choose live chat to accelerate the process. Seamless connections between your IVR and your digital channels creates the experiences customers expect and boosts satisfaction.

Helping your IVR flex

Your company’s IVR delivers value, and now with [these four imperatives for improvement you can boost your IVR game and become a favorite alongside their digital brethren](#). Because everyone, even the IVR, likes to flex every now and then.

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

More Information

Learn more!

Learn more about the 4 imperatives for your IVR in a digital world

[Learn more](#)