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Customer engagement, Contact Center AI

Three simple steps to address COVID-19 demands in your contact center

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The coronavirus pandemic has forced companies around the globe to protect their employees while developing business continuity plans. Businesses also are working to quickly relay the latest relevant information to their customers when guidelines and situations are fluid and changing sometimes hourly.

Customer contact centers are at the forefront of this effort, with organizations leaning heavily on automated virtual assistants and live human agents – who are in many cases now working remotely — to ease consumers' concerns and communicate critical information.

We have partnered with our customers over the last few weeks to organize and implement strategies that increase capacity, automate more conversations and enable agents to work effectively and safely from home. We've also recommended best practices to enterprises regarding how to service the increased demand from consumers. Here are some steps to consider as your team addresses peak demands:

Step 1:

Audit Your Current System and Offerings

- Address Your Agent Routing Setup: Because your agents may be reassigned, work remotely, or in worst-case scenarios, not able to work at all, determine if any changes will need to be made when it comes to sending inbound calls or chats to their appropriate destinations. In some scenarios, you may have to direct customers calling in by phone to other forms of communication (*e.g.,* chat via your app or website)

- Conduct a Quick Audit of Your Information and Offerings: In some cases, the services you're offering may no longer be relevant. For example, if you have a pharmacy application, you may consider switching to a "delivery-only" or "drive-thru-only" setup; and you may need to update your system's existing verbiage or options. If you tell consumers the hours of operation, be sure those are still accurate.

Step 2:

Determine Necessary Changes that Need to Happen

- Work With Your Conversational AI Team to Recognize Inbound Calls and Messages That Mention "Coronavirus": If you are using natural language (*e.g.,* "How can I help you today?"), coordinate with your team so that your system can recognize various utterances or mentions of "coronavirus" like "COVID," COVID-19," "the virus," "corona." If you don't have natural language recognition, consider adding an up-front question to address coronavirus issues.
- Consider Shifting Inbound Voice Calls to Digital: To address the high call demands, allow customers to seamlessly shift to Digital. This could be accomplished with simple prompts pointing a customer to the website, or more effective, offer the option and use SMS to send a link to the customer's mobile device so they can seamlessly switch modalities.
- Leverage Transcription Technology: If contact center agents are not available, leverage real-time transcription technology to create a script of a caller's request which your agents can work on in free time, using a Proactive Outbound Communication system to send SMS and email to provide the caller with the necessary information.
- Broadcast Key Messages Upfront: What is the first thing you want to convey to customers reaching out? You may consider proactively addressing extended wait times. In other cases, you may want to communicate a concrete message that could reduce calls to your agents (*e.g.,* "There will be no cancellation penalty or change fees for reservations made before [date].")
- Keep Your Message Concise: To make sure your message is well received, avoid a lengthy introduction. Consumers are aware of the current situation so keep focused on what you are doing to address it. If the business wants to express concern, just use a short simple phrase and move quickly to informative content.
- Strategically Place Your Updated Information: If you need to communicate more than one message to callers, work with your business team to determine which message has the highest priority. That one should be the *first* message customers hear. For example, you may want to just put the "extended hold times" message at the *end* of the exchange, just before it is transferred to a live agent.
- Have Backup Voice Talent Ready: In the case of voice channels, new automated messaging may need to be recorded quickly, at a time when your existing voice talent is unavailable. If that happens, it's best to use another trained voice talent in a professional recording studio that closest matches your existing talent, to avoid caller confusion or reduced credibility.

Step #3: Monitor and Reassess

- Once you have updated your system, it's critical to monitor logs and reports to see if changes are necessary. In normal times, it is recommended to let new enhancements "sit" for a few weeks to gauge how individuals respond. In today's unique case, you may need to make quick adjustments. Keep track of misrouted calls, hang-ups, or any other indication that adjustments may be needed.

We're in This Together

Find more information here regarding how Nuance can help you in these unprecedented times.

Tags: Customer experience, COVID-19

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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