



Keeping the Promise of Speech - Five Factors for Success

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For many call centers, speech technology offers great promise – of more effective customer interactions, lower costs, greater customer satisfaction, and perhaps competitive differentiation. While speech technology has matured, results from speech deployment have not always kept pace. Some who embark on limited speech projects find themselves with an expectation gap – while limited benefits are realized, the major benefits can prove elusive. Others shy away from speech because they deem it too costly, risky, or complex.

We have identified five key factors for speech deployment success that are often overlooked or under-appreciated. These five factors can help ensure the technology fully delivers on its promises.

First, establish a cross-functional team with staying power. This team should include people from the contact center, as well as technologists, and perhaps some back office or other areas. This team should be capable of both vision and execution. The team character should include persistence and commitment. Too often, speech projects begin without the capability to build and sustain momentum, critical for unlocking full value from the initiative.

Second, define a vision for speech in your company. Many organizations make the mistake of defining a small project without anchoring it in a larger context. Project scope focuses on cost reduction or risk mitigation, instead of the technology's potential to impact long term goals. To avoid this trap, develop a vision for speech that looks two to three years out, and has appropriate phases to achieve incremental improvements near term, and substantial impact long term. This is where having a visionary and committed team comes in. Remember, this is your opportunity to clarify what the promise of speech technology means for your business.

Third, retain the services of a good speech development partner, even if your long-term objective is to handle speech development internally. The right partner will help you avoid the most common pitfalls of the technology. They will also help you focus on your speech interface design, building your interface from the caller's perspective. We consider this approach to be critical to a successful speech implementation. If you have already deployed your speech application, you might consider using a third-party to perform a design review to help you uncover any areas you might improve. Choose this partner wisely, finding a partner with the speech experience and expertise you need.

Next, engage your staff in the design and deployment effort, including usability testing. Be clear about individual roles and expectations. Use agents as experts in caller issues, language, and expectations for interactions. Use your cross-functional team to provide key input and review for the design. Internal resources define *what* the speech application should do. Use the speech development partner, or trained designers and developers, as experts in speech applications who can show *how* to succeed with speech.

Finally, ensure that you load test your application. Speech applications are complex, and load testing is one way to make sure that you understand what can go wrong with the technology under load. We have seen great results from using automated load testing services, uncovering issues with the application itself, the platform, or the interaction with external databases.

To succeed with speech, you need to think differently than you have with in the past. Your team is responsible for creating change. Ensure that they are empowered to create and deliver a vision that goes beyond touch-tone self-service, considering effective identification of the caller and their need, and new or enhanced applications. Then you can keep the promise of speech for your organization.