SMS

VISUAL IVR

MOBILE DEVICES

VOICE BIOMETRICS

VIDEO

ARE YOU READY FOR THESE TECHNOLOGY ENHANCEMENTS?

5 cutting-edge contact center technologies that are moving beyond early adopters.

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A re you the type of person who can't wait to see what's in the next smartphone release? All the bells and whistles, bigger, faster, better. You may have similar feelings about intriguing new capabilities for the contact center. This article discusses five cutting-edge technologies that are poised to move beyond early adopters: Short Message Service (SMS), visual IVR, mobile devices, voice biometrics and video.

Texting the Contact Center

Voice and email have long been established channels for a customer to reach an agent. Web chat is also a mature offering. With the proliferation of mobile phones and increase in text messaging, SMS is gaining ground in customer service. With this channel, customers can "text" the center through an IVR menu choice, a button on a mobile application, or by simply entering a target number on their phones. Many companies proactively send text messages with order confirmations, ticket/case numbers, appointment reminders and other customer-specific information.

Leaders in financial services, travel and other industries leverage mobile apps to increase self-service. Instead of simply displaying the toll-free number in the "contact us" section of the application, a "push to call/text" button provides a quick path to an agent. These apps also facilitate switching between voice and text channels. For example, if I'm texting with an agent, I can request a call with that agent to clarify and resolve my issue. The agent can follow up with a confirmation or "recap" text to my phone. Interweaving text with voice builds momentum for text-based offerings and delivers a great customer experience. To optimize costs, agents can handle multiple texts and/or support other media such as email simultaneously.

Visual IVR

Smart phone apps can provide visual menus that replicate the spoken menu choices offered in traditional IVRs. Customers use their touch screens to navigate through the visual menus and transfer to the appropriate agent groups.

To optimize the customer experience, visual IVR menus can be dynamic, based on customer value, segmentation or where they are in the app. When the customer asks to switch channels and speak to an agent, they need not navigate the IVR menu choices again. The call transfers directly to the appropriate queue based on where the caller exited the application, along with any other information that is available on the account.

Visual IVRs are a way to leverage your existing IVR investment, maintain the voice interface on the IVR for those who do use it, and add another option to increase your self-service success. If you can't get the funding for dynamic menus or sophisticated self-service apps, visual IVR is still a worthy investment. It gives you a mobile presence that enhances the customer experience while enabling you to deflect voice calls and shorten handle times.

(For more in-depth information on mobile apps, IVR and the contact center, see "State of the IVR: Industry Experts Weigh-in," *Pipeline*, November 2013; "Can Mobile be the Birth of Great Customer Experiences?" *Pipeline*, September 2013; and "Mobile and the Contact Center: The Game Is Changing," *Pipeline*, November 2012).

Bring Your Own Device to the Contact Center

Many companies operate on a Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) basis for mobile phones and tablets. Employees use their own equipment as their primary voice and data endpoints, tapping into the enterprise phone system, email, data sources, etc. This arrangement streamlines device
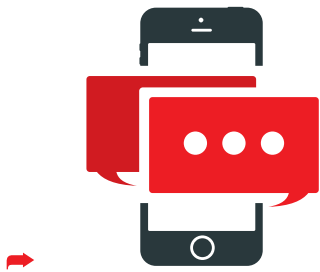
THE COMPELLING CASE FOR TEXT

Text messaging is widely adopted, and is fast becoming the preferred communication channel of many demographics and generations. *Business Insider* states that millennials between 18 and 24 send, on average, 67 texts per day (*making that a total of 2,022 texts sent per month—they receive an additional 1,831*), which is double the next demographic age group (*25 to 34*) and 10 times those over 55. Furthermore, Pew Research states that text messaging is becoming preferred by a growing number of consumers, with 31% of mobile phone owners choosing text over talk. Additionally, research from many sources (*Forrester, ContactBabel and OneReach, to name a few*) show that text messaging interaction with customers is cheaper than voice calls: specifically $2-$5 vs. $6-$26, respectively.

management, especially for mobile workers, increases productivity, and lowers IT spending. But is this concept adaptable for the contact center? Maybe.

Centers need to work through their BYOD logistics and policies. For example, who is responsible for purchasing devices and services—the employee or the employer? If the company supplies the devices, can it restrict employees to use them for business purposes only? If so, how? Will the corporate phone system point extensions to cell phones, or will there be two separate numbers and phones? And, perhaps most significantly, how do you draw the line between work and personal time when a center employee is always connected and accessible?

There are significant security issues that must be addressed when implementing BYOD. With access to files on the network, confidential company information, such as emails, documents and customer information will reside on the mobile devices and may be stored in a public or private cloud outside the corporately secured storage systems. Most smart phones have security settings and can force passwords, but if policies are not enforced, they are useless and expose companies to vulnerabilities if the phone is left unattended, lost or stolen. In addition, mobile apps can contain viruses that could jeopardize corporate data networks.

Companies that allow BYOD must establish formal company policies that cover device ownership, IT support, passcode requirements, antivirus protection, encryption and mobile app monitoring and approval. If the company allows people to use their own phones, IT should evaluate different manufacturers for security, encryption and connectivity methods, and provide an "approved" list for employees. IT should deploy mobile device management (MDM) software that addresses many of these issues. These solutions provide centralized management of the devices to include network access, encryption and security measures, such as the ability to remotely lock and/or wipe the devices as necessary.

BYOD may not be a fit for traditional, static contact centers. However, it may benefit mobile supervisors and managers who access other contact center tools such as reporting and quality monitoring. Many contact center technology companies have developed applications for tablets and smartphones that allow users to view statistics, run reports or even make call-routing changes. It is easy to see the benefit of these users having their extensions on their BYOD as well.

Voice Biometrics for Customer Authentication

IVR authentication typically involves asking callers to enter their personal identification numbers (PIN) or passwords after their account or customer identifiers to complete identification and verification (ID&V). Voice biometrics is another form of ID&V that uses the unique characteristics of a voice (tone, pitch, frequency and resonance) to confirm identity. It augments the process of asking customers for a PIN in IVR self-service applications and works with either touch-tone or speech-enabled IVRs.

To initiate voice biometrics, customers repeat a phrase several times to capture the voice print for "registration." When they call back, they are prompted to repeat that same phrase for ID&V. If the registration phrase gets corrupted or lost, the system will re-register the customer with another phrase. This method is technically a combination of biometrics and passwords.

Voice biometrics offers several benefits. Some studies estimate it reduces ID&V time by 75% over agent authentication, and half over IVR PIN entry. Customers don't have to remember anything, as the system prompts them for the previously captured pass phrase. Furthermore, a recent Nuance survey found that 90% of customers would prefer voice biometrics for authentication over passwords and intrusive security questions. They also tout a large (95% plus) success rate. Security is another benefit. Your voice print can't be easily stolen like a PIN, or be lost or forgotten. When there is a failure, PIN backup can be easily incorporated into the ID&V flow.

Voice biometrics has some drawbacks. It is a more expensive ID&V method. Background noise can influence the match rate, especially when conversations can be detected over the caller's passphrase. Nuance acknowledges about a 3% drop in success when callers have colds; however, the overall success rate for voice biometrics is far greater than the 40% to 60% PIN entry delivers. There are also concerns that criminals can record your voice while speaking

the passphrase, and use it to access your accounts. However, this is no more a threat than stealing your PIN through DTMF detection devices.

Although this authentication method has not been widely adopted, industries such as financial services, health care and government, where security is always of concern, will probably lead the way. Many pilots are under way and they will provide customer feedback, success rates and costs to compare with traditional PIN/password methods.

Use of Video in the Contact Center

New innovations in data networking are adding bandwidth and capabilities to corporate networks. As a result, many contact center solution manufacturers are touting the benefits of video into the contact center. WebRTC and other protocols are making it easier to video-enable your contact center agent desktop, opening the possibility of one-way or two-way video (commonly known as video chat). In addition, many centers are pushing pre-recorded self-help videos to customers either directly from an agent, or on their website.

Several companies have found unique and useful ways to introduce videos to the contact center. Amazon, for example, has the "Mayday" button on its Kindle Fire HDX that connects a customer with a live agent for video-enhanced assistance. Retail businesses can use video-connected specialty agents to provide more personalized interaction with consumers and increase sales. High-value interactions, such as financial services, may benefit from the relationship building that video can facilitate. Some interior design or home improvement companies can utilize video to approximate a face-to-face meeting to discuss remodeling designs and trade ideas in real time. Additionally, heath care providers can use video chats in triage or advice lines, potentially preventing a trip to the doctor or emergency room and reducing healthcare costs.

As beneficial as these use cases seem, we have not seen wide-scale adoption of video-enabled agents. Two-way video is almost unheard of, as most customers consider this too intrusive—if they have the technology and know-how to use it. There are significant investments to make to transition to video, including technology upgrades, training and staffing (you need camera-comfortable agents), and even possibly facilities changes. You may even need some dress code changes! The value these video chats bring, such as increased sales or increased customer retention, must be great enough to overcome the costs. However, using YouTube videos on the website or pushed by agents appears to be more successful. If a picture is worth a thousand words, then imagine how many words a video is worth. The ability to show visually how to accomplish something, or demonstrate a product is invaluable, and benefits sales, marketing, customer service and technical support.

Are You Ready to Take the Leap?

Do any of these cutting-edge contact center technologies sound intriguing? You may have already formed an opinion and think "it's not for us" or "I must have it!" However, before you walk away or start calling solution providers, make sure you consider your opportunity thoroughly. Is there a use case and can you clearly define what success looks like? If so, get cost estimates and conduct ROI analyses, budget, plan, pilot and get user feedback before full deployment. Many of these new technologies hold great promise and just might be the next great thing to benefit your center and your customers. ⓟ

PUSHING PRE-RECORDED SELF-HELP VIDEOS

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