

SPEECH RECOGNITION FOR CUSTOMER SUPPORT

2005 COMPUTERWORLD HONORS CASE STUDY

TRANSPORTATION

A NATURAL SPEECH, APPLICATION ALLOWS AUTO CLUB MEMBERS TO COMPLETE A NUMBER OF PRE-DETERMINED SELF-SERVICE TRANSACTIONS QUICKLY AND CONVENIENTLY, ENHANCING CUSTOMER SATISFACTION, FILLING THE NEED FOR IMMEDIATE GRATIFICATION, PROMOTING SAFER CELL PHONE USE, AND BUILDING CUSTOMER LOYALTY. [20055425]



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SUMMARY

AAA Minnesota/Iowa customers or members calling into its contact center are presented with a natural speech, application that allows them to complete a number of pre-determined self-service transactions quickly and conveniently. This contributes to customer satisfaction by recognizing the consumer's need for immediate gratification and their need for safer cell phone usage. In addition, it helps reinforce member loyalty, something very important to AAA which has almost nine out of 10 of its members renewing their each year.

APPLICATION

AAA is a not-for-profit organization of motor clubs serving 47 million members in the U.S. and Canada. Through affiliations with other motoring clubs around the world, AAA provides benefits to its members traveling in 110 countries on six continents. Today, 25 percent of all U.S. households have a AAA membership, making AAA the largest travel organization in North America. More information is available at www.aaa.com.

AAA's telecommunications service philosophy is to provide a "call center of one," or virtual call center. In effect, this means that callers feel as though the services and benefits of membership are instantly available to them any time via the telephone. In order to fulfill this customer expectation, AAA deployed a computer telephony integration (CTI) system that supports its call center infrastructure through the use of innovative customer service applications and speech-enabled solutions.

BENEFITS

The benefits of this CTI system are significant. Since the speech-enabled solutions were implemented, the number of calls that must be handled by agents has been reduced—allowing AAA to redeploy those service employees elsewhere. Meanwhile agent productivity has increased and AAA has maintained its service satisfaction levels with members while enjoying historic renewal rate levels.

IMPORTANCE

The key to this success story is a two-site call center solution based on a converged voice and data network that supports the AAA agents who handle approximately 650,000 calls per year. Based in Burnsville, Minnesota, the solution employs an array of Avaya products, including the S8700 Media Server, MCC1 Media Gateway, Communication Manager, and G700 Gateway Server. A S8300 Media Server operating in LSP mode is networked in Bettendorf, Iowa.

This converged configuration supports the call center infrastructure for AAA Minnesota/Iowa, and it also supports membership and travel services. The AAA call center in West Des Moines handles roadside assistance with the help of an extended private node that expands central switching to remote sites. In addition to the Burnsville and West Des Moines call centers, there are an additional 26 branch locations throughout the two states.

This solution is further enhanced by the use of Voice over Internet Protocol (VOIP) technology, which is used to transmit voice calls over the Internet. Because VOIP has access to the Internet's wide bandwidth, it expedites calls and ensures that customers contacting any of the AAA locations receive prompt and responsive service.

The CTI system AAA used prior to Avaya performed inconsistently in the crucial area of "screen pops."

Screen pops consist of valuable customer account information that is automatically generated on agent terminals as they receive calls. The former system generated screen pops on only about 30 percent of incoming calls, while the Avaya system generates them on 60 percent of incoming calls. This access to critical customer data significantly increases the ability of agents to provide the highest level of customer service. Avaya partnered with Gold Systems to provide this key capability.

AAA uses speech recognition for a variety of applications. Using natural, spoken commands, members are able to call AAA using their hard-wired or cell phones to renew or upgrade memberships, check the status of an existing roadside assistance call, change an address, request a map or routing, and other applications.

ORIGINALITY

Since it began in 1902, the AAA brand has represented quality and trust in its unique mix of membership, travel, insurance and financial services products. Because AAA has been willing to embrace technology to meet the ever-changing needs and expectations of its members and customers, it has stood the test of time, and more than 100 years after its start boasts more than 47 million members. Of those, 728,000 are AAA Minnesota/Iowa members. AAA Minnesota/Iowa is part of The Auto Club Group (ACG), the largest affiliation of AAA clubs in the Midwest, with 4.1 million members.

SUCCESS

Overall AAA's goals with the speech recognition pilot program, which launched in mid-2003, were to reduce the costs of customer care through the use of speech technology while continuing to provide superior customer service. AAA's success in accomplishing these goals was measured in several ways:

Shorter Call Duration: When a AAA customer speaks to an agent, the average call duration is 3.5 minutes. For calls that can be fully automated using speech recognition, the duration of the in-bound call is reduced by 54 percent to only 1.37 minutes. This translates into an average cost avoidance per automated transaction call of more than \$1.90 when considering long distance charges, staff time, etc.

Increased Use of Automation Option: Approximately 15 percent of all 800 number in-bound calls are using the speech recognition solution for select roadside assistance, member service and auto travel requests as compared to one percent of fully automated calls for these same services with the previous touchtone technology.

Agent Productivity: If the level of calls received during the pilot program is maintained, AAA Minnesota/Iowa could save approximately 5,000 hours of agent time across multiple areas. This productivity improvement is equivalent to five full-time employees.

Meeting Customer Service Expectations: When customers call AAA, their wait times have been reduced. If the service they seek is speech-automated, the capacity of the system is such that there is no wait time at all. If a customer becomes confused while using speech recognition applications, the system is designed to recognize that, and the customer is transferred to an agent for assistance. Ongoing satisfaction surveys conducted by AAA for a variety of service areas have shown no negative effects from having more callers using the speech recognition applications instead of a live agent.

Return on Investment: At the current rate of acceptance, AAA Minnesota/Iowa could anticipate a payback on its investment in less than the 36 months.

DIFFICULTY