Do You Really Know Your Customer Data?
A Behind-the-Scenes Look: How Organizations Fail to Leverage Customer Data from IVR to Improve Customer Experience

Nowadays organizations are inundated with customer data. The debate on how to best leverage this data is a hot topic. Most companies have gotten smart about using data from their web channel and call center agents, but these alone don’t provide a full picture. If the goal is to understand the customer’s experience with the brand, businesses that don’t include data from all service channels cannot accurately assess the experience. If enterprises aren’t collecting the right data from the Interactive Voice Response (IVR) channel they are missing a huge piece of the puzzle, and one that strongly influences the true customer experience. The IVR is almost always the first interaction that consumers have when they call for customer service; the IVR is like the “front door” to the phone channel – so there is clearly opportunity to mine significant customer data from it.

Do you really know your IVR customer data? Ask yourself these questions:

- Do you know the top five goals your customer wants to accomplish in the IVR?
- What success metrics do you define in the IVR? Can you apply the conversion or accomplishment metric from your website to provide channel comparisons?
- How quickly does your fastest customer navigate your IVR? The slowest?
- What points cause the most difficulty in your self-service channel, and when do customers opt out to the live-agent channel?
- What analytics are you using to ensure your IVR is performing at its peak?
- Do you leverage the web interaction data in your IVR? Visa versa? With call center agents?

As a leading provider of customer self-service solutions, our organization (Contact Solutions) has experience helping large businesses across myriad industries to optimize their IVR systems and glean the most useful data from them. What we’ve found is that many enterprises make basic mistakes that seriously impact the value of their data. First and foremost, many organizations don’t take a fully representative sample of customer data. For example, one client was using a customer scoring system by analyzing data from the website and the live-agent interactions in the call center. However, the company was not including data from the IVR in its analysis of its customers, effectively ignoring one of the most important – and frequently used (more than 50% of all customer interactions) – customer segments where first impressions with the brand are made. The result: the client damaged the validity of its data and therefore missed an opportunity to make a positive impact on the business and instead made a service change that was largely ineffective.

Also, we regularly see businesses failing to use collected data to improve the customer experience. Companies must not only track customer data across channels, but utilize it immediately and with fluidity in order to best serve clientele – otherwise known as the practice of service continuity. These actions can sometimes be quite simple, but can have an enormous impact on customer satisfaction. For example, when consumers call customer service and are required to enter an account number or phone number in the IVR, they shouldn’t be required to repeat that information if transferred to a live agent. Similarly, if consumers are using an online service channel and then choose to call customer service for additional help, the phone channel should be linked to the online channel in order to pick up where the customer left off and expedite the service process.

Enterprises also frequently miss the opportunity to tailor the IVR experience based on past customer behavior. For example, imagine a customer who frequently calls the IVR for service surrounding the
same task or problem. Each new instance that this customer calls he should be offered a shortcut to accomplish that goal, since there is a high likelihood that is what he is calling about. By implementing personalized touches like this in the IVR, companies can reduce customers’ time and effort and thus reduce customer service costs by hopefully allowing more customers to be serviced effectively in the IVR without needing to transfer to live agents.

However, with so many avenues to leverage data to improve customer experience, many organizations get overwhelmed and don’t know where to begin or how to translate it into business results. When the prospect of big data is intimidating, sometimes it is better to start small – and what better place to begin than analyzing customer interactions that are already happening in the customer service frontlines, the IVR? We suggest the following four actions to take today:

- **IVR customer interaction data represents the voice of your consumer and should be considered as valuable as receiving daily focus group results.** So to begin, make sure to mine the right data; track the Who, When, Where, Frequency and Length of customer service interactions, and compare them with benchmarks – both industry and other channels. Consider, are you managing your IVR by art and intuition or by using data-driven customer insights?

- **Next, ensure that data entered in the IVR is immediately visible in the call center and other service channels, and vice versa.** There is no use in having valuable customer data if it can’t be effectively leveraged to improve customer experience on the spot.

- **Once the right IVR data is in place and being mined on a regular basis, be sure to share the findings with your marketing, sales, account management and even executive-level departments to drive business decisions.** This data is critical to the continuous improvement of your customer experience and has direct influence on revenue.

- **Don’t forget the big picture.** IVR is a good place to start, but establish a plan to incorporate and compare customer data from all service channels to best complement an overall brand strategy. Customer perception data from surveys is also valuable, especially when combined with actionable information from all customer service channels.

About the Author:
Justin Lemrow, Director of Continuous Improvement at Contact Solutions, manages the practice that focuses on two core objectives: increasing customer satisfaction and automating more transactions across customer’s solutions. Justin has more than a decade of process improvement experience in the telecommunications and technology sector, leveraging consulting experience at Accenture and driving operational efficiency at Sprint-Nextel. Blending both business and technical experience he is particularly suited for matching and valuating solution improvement to executive business owners.