Forty7Ronin

5 Key Ways to Improve Your IVR Performance

Challenges

An IVR is made up of many moving parts that must each work flawlessly to ensure customer satisfaction

A bad IVR system doesn't just drive away customers—it can damage your entire brand, resulting in irreversible lost credibility.

These two issues can lead to increased operational expenses and lost revenue.

Outcomes

Small adjustments to your IVR can have a meaningful impact to your customers.

It requires steps such as performing a system review, increasing data collection and deeper analysis

These will provide the basis for an IVR tune up that provides a generous Return On Investment (ROI)

Summary

An Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system is critical for things like automating call routing and providing customer support. It is a key facet of your brand and one of the first points of engagement for your customers. Your IVR must perform both technically and from a brand management perspective in providing the messaging and tone that best represents your brand. If your IVR is frustrating, difficult to navigate, improperly tuned, or inaccurate, you could be costing your business valuable revenue. Explore five key ways to improve your performance and keep this critical system running with precision and accuracy.

Introduction

When your customers call your company for support, questions or service, is your IVR a brand builder or a reputation destroyer? Is it boosting your bottom line or costing you money? In short, what experience are you delivering to your customers?
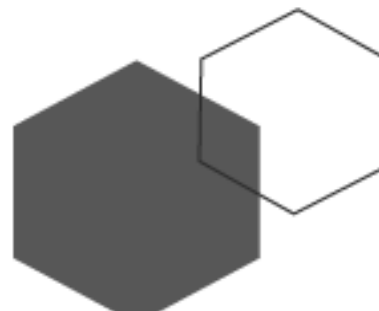
> "What is with your telephone system!? Was on hold for 45 minutes and no advisor is available!!! Disgusting!!"
>
> *Source: onholdwith.com*

Automated customer support is extremely valuable for simplifying customer service, managing high call volumes (or managing lower volumes with less staff) and prioritizing caller importance. Not only that, it's a revenue booster. Automated service is a cost-effective tool that allows you to extend your hours and geographic areas (including global expansion). Furthermore, automated systems can reduce the time your customer service representatives spend on non-income-producing tasks, such as placing service calls, managing payments or answering simple questions.
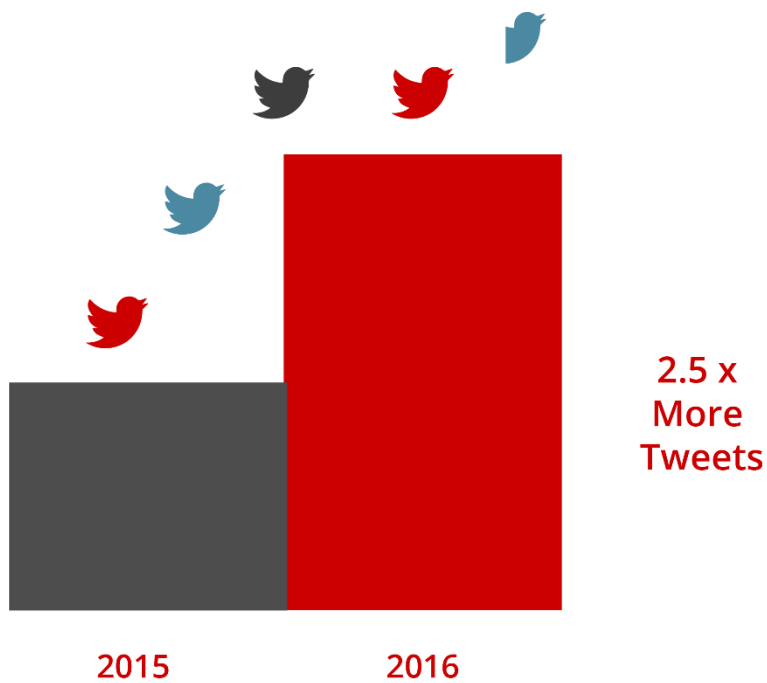
However, when your IVR system works poorly, the negative outcomes can far outweigh the benefits. A poorly tuned, hard-

to-navigate IVR solution can cost your business money and quickly devalue your brand in the eyes of consumers. How? Today's consumers have enormous power to share their experiences with the public and multiple outlets to do so.

You've probably seen examples of customer service gone wrong and its powerful impact on a company's reputation. Through social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, customers can quickly and easily disseminate their negative experiences to millions of viewers within minutes, creating a lasting impact on one's brand that can take quite a bit of work to repair. And this method of customer communication isn't going away any time soon. A recent report by social media giant Twitter[i] noted that customer tweets to (and about) B2C companies have more than doubled in the last two years—and that number is predicted to grow even larger in years to come.

2.5 x More Tweets

2015   2016

This means it is imperative that you consider your IVR technology to be as much a consumer-facing brand tool as your marketing campaigns, your employees, your website, or any other resource in your arsenal—and that you treat it accordingly. Fortunately, there are multiple strategies to improve your IVR system and keep it operating as an integral piece of your overall brand experience. The following are five key ways to begin improving
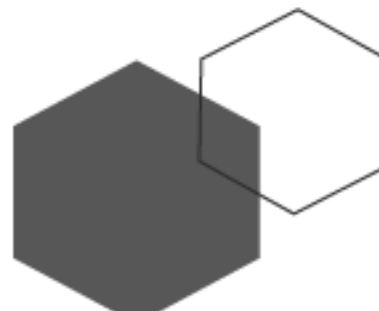
your IVR performance that will optimize your internal operations, save time and money, and deliver an excellent experience for your customers.

1. Conduct an Overview of Your Existing IVR System

Depending on the size of your company, your IVR technology could be processing thousands—or even millions—of calls per day. Conducting a general overview of your system can help you discover issues you may not know are impacting your bottom line or your brand perceptions. Let's look at easy ways you can begin creating a picture of its effectiveness.

Interview Your Customer Service Team

The best place to begin when reviewing your system is to talk with the team that handles your inbound calls after customers have navigated the system. Your reps are on the front line of your IVR system, and they can provide keen insight into what's working—and what's not. Here are a few questions to ask your internal team about the overall IVR experience of their inbound callers:

- Do you ever receive complaints from customers about their wait time, menu navigation, or ability to communicate with the automated system? If so, what are the most common issues?
- Do you ever experience challenges with the system, such as improperly routed calls, hang-ups before connection or low call volume?
- Does the IVR ask for information the agent must ask for a second time?
- How many calls per day come from customers "zeroing out" of the system?
- What would help you to do your job better?
- What would you eliminate from the existing system?
- What is working well for you and the rest of the team?
- What positive comments do customers share about their experience with the system?
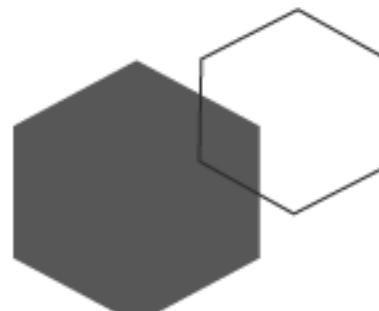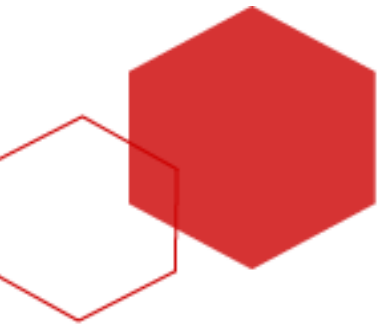
These questions can help you create a better understanding of your overall customer service experience and discover if there are critical areas that need fixing.

Review Your Call Center Data

Another way to assess your existing system is to review your current data on calls. (If you don't have this data, keep reading to discover how to set up a reporting and analytics system). Data can tell you a lot about the pain points in your IVR system. For example, do you see a lot of calls that never connect to the proper agent? This could be a sign that your menu isn't clear enough. Do your customers consistently resort to pressing the zero key instead of following the prompts? This could be a sign that your call containment strategy needs work or that your system is frustrating from the moment they connect: too slow, too complicated, annoying voice prompts, bad hold music, etc.

Do you know if your system drops calls? Or are you wrongly interpreting them as hang-ups?

Is it easy for your customers to be routed to the proper department or agent? Or do they exit the system early because of frustration?

What is the overall satisfaction rate with your calls? Do your customers give up before resolving their issues?

Is your system properly tuned for your dominant customer base? Have you taken the time to create the proper grammar/utterance/dialect to ensure you aren't losing containment based on something as simple as word choice or pronunciation?

Does the call disposition match the caller's stated call drivers? ARE you even capturing disposition?
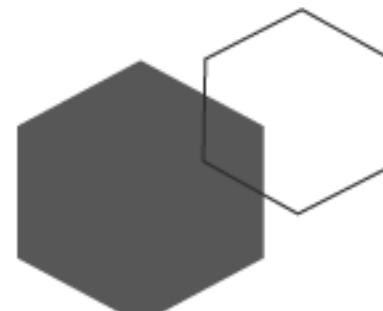
Conduct a Post-Call Customer Survey

A direct customer service survey can also help you to gain a better understanding of how your IVR service is operating. Upon completion of the call, you can direct customers to an automated survey, connect them with a live support specialist, or send them an email survey to provide feedback on their experience.

With the proper insights gained from a review of your existing system, you can begin to make concrete changes that will optimize your IVR technology and create an experience that reflects positively on your brand, provides great customer service and accomplishes your company goals.

## 2. Establish an IVR Reporting and Analytics System

When it comes to improving your IVR performance, nothing works better for measuring results than cold, hard data. After all, how do you know if your system is working well if you don't have a way to track its day-to-day operations? Here are some tips to help you get started.
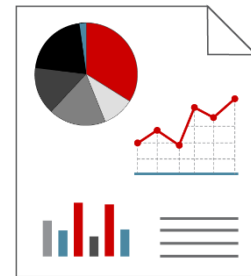
Establish your Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

What results do you wish to measure in your IVR system? Common measurements include:

- Call drop rate/abandonment: How many customers hang up before navigating the menu?
- "Zero out" rate/breaking containment: How many customers end up hitting zero to bypass the system?
- Task completion rate: How many menu tasks are completed, such as providing information, completing transactions or reaching the proper rep?
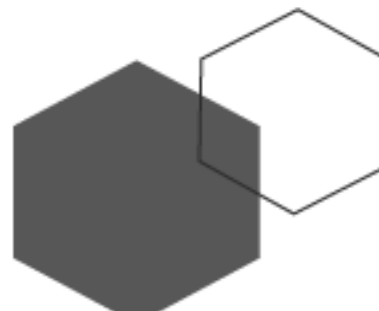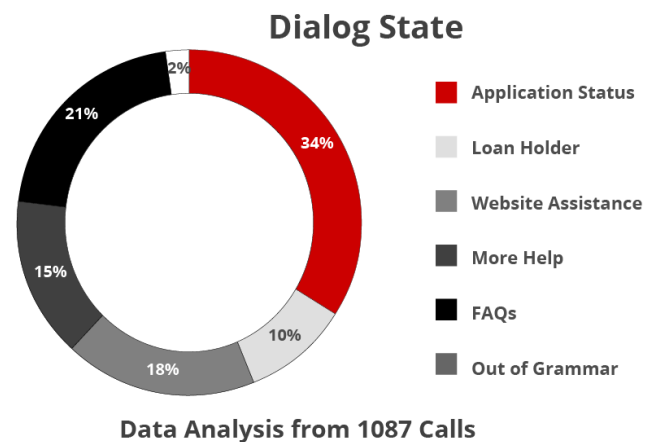
- Call completion rate: How many calls are completed in a satisfactory manner?
- Wait time: Are customers spending significant time on hold?
- Outcomes: Depending on your system, are your calls resulting in closed sales, processed transactions, or service call placed/resolved?

Once you've set your KPIs, you can begin recording data on each call for these specific metrics. If your system does not have a reporting mechanism, you need to develop one, whether it's an add-on application or an outsourced analytics partner. These metrics are the best way to determine if your current IVR is providing a positive customer experience and delivering the results you wish to achieve.

Set Goals for Your IVR Performance

Upon establishing your KPIs and reporting, it's time to determine your ideal results. Do you wish to achieve a high level of containment? Increase close rates on inbound sales calls? Reduce call drops? Track call volumes to ensure proper staffing? Set the realistic results you believe your IVR should achieve over a set period of time. Then examine your reports to discover if you are hitting your benchmarks.

Dialog State

34%
2%
21%
15%
18%
10%

- Application Status
- Loan Holder
- Website Assistance
- More Help
- FAQs
- Out of Grammar

**Data Analysis from 1087 Calls**

Establishing a reporting and analytics system allows you to discover areas where your IVR technology may need improvement, allowing you to consistently adapt and improve your system and meet your performance goals.

3. Conduct an IVR Tune-Up
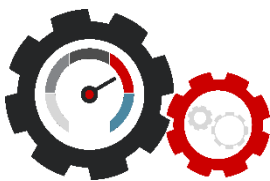
Even the greatest IVR systems will need an occasional tune-up. You simply cannot plan for every contingency that may develop as your
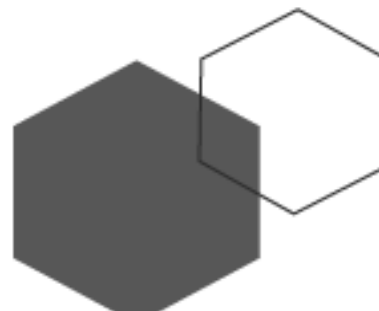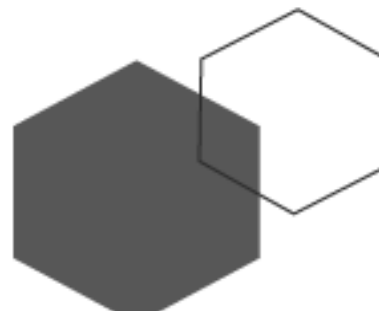
system and your customer base evolves. Your IVR system is an incredibly complex investment and, like any tool or machine, it requires maintenance to ensure it operates properly. IVR tuning is often compared to the general maintenance performed on a car over its lifetime: oil changes, alignments or spark plug replacements. It's the work you do to keep your system running smoothly and prevent larger issues before they happen.

Additionally, IVR tuning can also be an alternative to solution to more drastic—or expensive—measures such as total system replacement or outsourcing. Instead of throwing out the entire system, small changes can have a dramatic impact on your system's performance.

IVR tuning can encompass a variety of projects, including:

- Dialog State Tuning: Focus on prompt and grammar in a specific dialog state
- SLM Tuning: Work with an open-ended prompt and the SLM grammar
- Holistic Application Tuning: Optimize the application flow for overall improvement
- Goal-oriented Tuning: Tune with specific results in mind; mostly used for improving task completions

Although every project is different, a typical tuning project will follow the same general steps:

The system is checked to ensure results align with the outcome desired.

Test and Review Results — Step Six:
The system is checked to ensure results align with the outcome desired.

Implement the changes — Step Five:
The system is tuned in accordance with the findings and recommendations.

Deliver a Tuning Report — Step Four:
A report with findings and recommendations is presented.

Analyze the results — Step Three:
Data is reviewed to discover any processes within the system delivering desired results (e.g. simple issues: phrasing issues or missing pronunciations; complex: poor settings and disorganized menus)

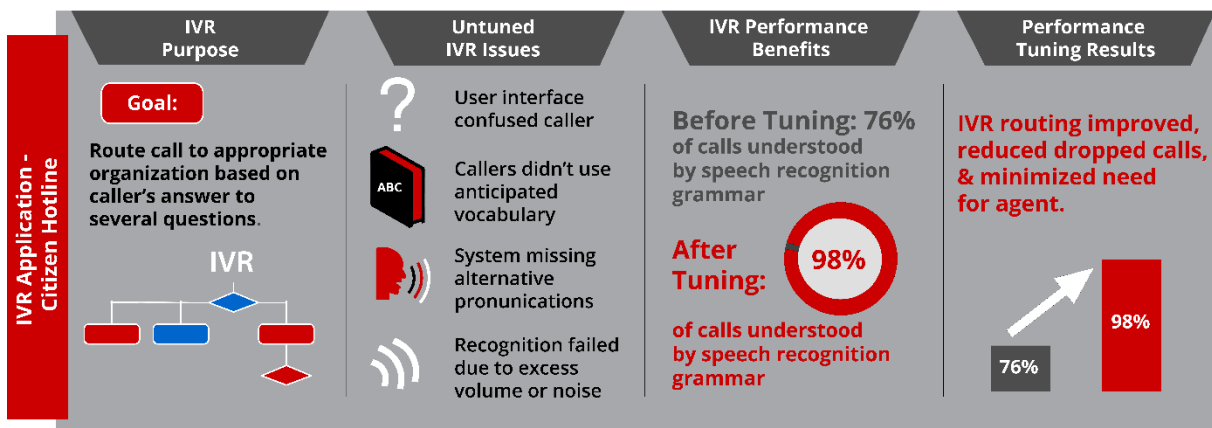**Transcribe utterances/monitor calls/analyze logs** — Step Two:
Listening in on calls is very important to develop an understanding about the of your system. Review can include transcription,demographics, false acceptance rate and in/out of grammar utterances.

Establish success criteria — Step One:
Determine why you want to have your system tuned and what success looks like upon completion.

IVR tuning can be an ideal option for improving your current system. It can discover and solve challenges without disrupting your day-to-day operations or costing you time and money in overhauling or replacing your existing solution.

A state agency was struggling with making their existing IVR system more efficient and user-friendly for inbound callers. They contracted an IVR tuning partner to help them optimize their system.

IVR Application - Citizen Hotline

IVR Purpose
Goal:
Route call to appropriate organization based on caller's answer to several questions.
IVR

Untuned IVR Issues
User interface confused caller
Callers didn't use anticipated vocabulary
System missing alternative pronunications
Recognition failed due to excess volume or noise

IVR Performance Benefits
Before Tuning: 76% of calls understood by speech recognition grammar
After Tuning: 98% of calls understood by speech recognition grammar

Performance Tuning Results
IVR routing improved, reduced dropped calls, & minimized need for agent.
76% 98%

The Challenge: After transcribing and monitoring multiple calls, a variety of issues were discovered. The interface/menu was confusing to customers, causing them to drop out of calls early. Callers were also not using the anticipated vocabulary installed in the system, which made it difficult for them to trigger the proper prompts. Additionally, alternate pronunciations of city names, county names and certain words were not in the system, causing callers to quit the call or zero out of containment.

The Solution: To achieve the agency's goal of a more user-friendly experience, the system was tuned to accommodate the dominant dialectical characteristics of the region and the vocabulary and grammars were adjusted. The system was also updated with a confirmation feature that was triggered by ambiguous pronunciations or confusing responses. Finally, the system was changed from speed-focused to accuracy-focused and tested to ensure changes were implanted properly.

The Results: The agency achieved its goal of an optimized, user-friendly system, reducing dropped calls and increasing system containment.

4. Upgrade Your IVR System with Legacy Migration

In some cases, improving your IVR system requires more than tuning or testing. Like any technology, IVR continues to evolve—and your system may be getting left behind. This sort of technology deficit can cause large issues internally and hurt your brand externally. A solution that hasn't kept pace with your company growth or customer expectations can create extended hold times, lost calls, customer frustration, lost revenue and other issues. Here are some common problems that drive many companies to consider a legacy migration for their IVR solution:

- Your technology has become dated, leaving you lagging behind the competition.
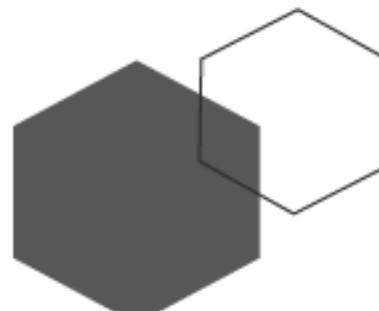
- Your call volume has exceeded the limits of your system and cannot expand further.
- Constant upgrades and changes are becoming too expensive.
- Your solution is inflexible and unscalable, limiting your market adaptability.
- Your IT team invests significant time in repairing or adapting the system.
- Hardware has become unavailable; applications can no longer be added.

What is a legacy migration?

A legacy migration transfers your existing legacy applications to current IVR methodologies using a support platform and business process re-engineering methodologies. While the migration is performed, significant effort is made to retain as much information from the previous application such as audio, grammars, backend calls and other valuable collateral. It treats your data as an asset to be preserved and leveraged in the future. A new application is created with this information and then the application is tested repeatedly to ensure it is functional.

Why choose legacy migration?

Legacy migration is a cost-effective solution for companies that have systems that need more than tuning, but for whom a new solution would be too disruptive or expensive. It allows for the preservation of valuable data, while bringing your system up-to-date with modern applications.

5. Switch to a Hosted IVR Solution

If you already have an existing, on-premise IVR solution, moving to a hosted solution can seem like a drastic measure. However, it can also be
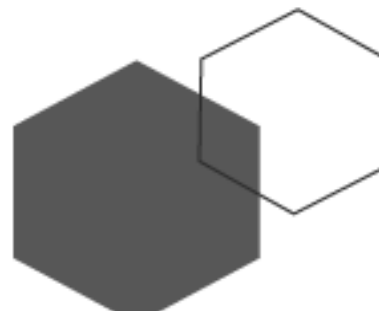
the most cost-effective way to manage the high-level operations required in today's modern IVR systems. If your system needs an overhaul or replacement, and tuning or legacy migration are not an option, a hosted solution may be the perfect solution.

A hosted IVR solution houses your applications and your environment in an offsite facility run by experts in the field of customer experience, interactive voice response and hosting. Your provider creates a customized IVR system that connects to your company on the back-end.

The benefits of a hosted IVR solution include:

- Cost-effective with no hardware or maintenance
- No need for onsite support to manage the system
- Fast implementation
- Customizable solutions
- Ability to adapt rapidly
- Extensive reporting from experts
- Scalable
- Fast deployment

For companies with an existing IVR system, shifting to a hosted, off-premise solution is an option if your technology is so outdated or irreparable that other improvement methods are simply not feasible.

Conclusion

Your IVR system is an important, customer-facing representation of your brand. Consistent, efficient and customer-friendly performance is essential to ensuring that your technology is an asset to your company. Following any one or a combination of these key actions, your company can ensure that your IVR system operates in a way that streamlines performance, enhances your bottom line and delivers a brand-reinforcing customer service experience.
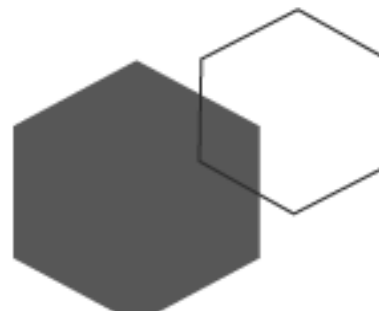
About Forty 7 Ronin

Forty 7 Ronin was founded in Colorado in 2011 by members of the IVR and speech recognition industry who discovered better methods to boost IVR performance. In addition to IVR tuning, our company offers VUI design, IVR development, IVR reporting and analytics, IVR migration and hosted IVR solutions. We also provide IVR training courses and certifications that can be delivered in a variety of formats, including classroom, onsite and online – using real world examples and scenarios.

 With every engagement, Forty 7 Ronin focuses on your company, working with your team to establish and refine your goals and ensure every project is guided by success criteria that are measurable and achievable. Unlike professional services (PS) companies and software companies, who want to sell either more hours or more software licenses - our goal is to create successful customer engagement. Explore our website at www.Forty7Ronin.com to learn more about our services. Please contact us at 719-445-8054 or marketing@forty7ronin.com.

[i]] https://twitter.app.box.com/v/customer-service-on-twitter