Why Now is the **Best Time** to **Modernize** Your IVR

Five Key Strategies to Improve **CX Performance** and Business Results

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What You'll Learn in this Paper:

Companies that want to succeed in their industry must work hard to ensure they use every tool available to deliver a superior experience.

Optimizing your IVR with tuning, system upgrades and other modifications will turn your inbound calling system into a brand-reinforcing asset that provides your customers with the experience they expect — and deserve.

Forty**7**Ronin

Challenges

Companies struggling to compete are overwhelmed by and unprepared for how much CX drives marketing strategy.

Updating speech tech solutions is key to CX success. But companies often neglect this area.

Smaller companies with smaller budgets struggle to innovate in CX and IVR.

Outcomes

CX focus will keep your company competitive.

By updating IVR or implementing a new system, your CX strategy will improve.

Stay competitive in the industry by modernizing CX strategy and speech tech with cost-effective changes.

Overview: Key Industry Trends

A recent Gartner survey declared that customer experience (CX) remains the toughest — and most important — battlefront of any company's marketing strategy. According to their 2017 Customer Experience in Marketing Survey: "More than two-thirds of marketers responsible say their companies compete mostly on the basis of CX."[1] What does that mean for your business? Simply put, if your company isn't focusing on CX, you're going to get left behind — and your competitors will happily pick up where you left off.

"Customer experience moves us beyond the traditional definition of customer service—It is...about the bigger picture of what happens before and after these service interactions."

- Bruce Jones,
Senior Programming Director
Disney Institute

But what, exactly, does CX entail? It's not as simple as providing a single great experience at the cash register (although that's certainly a component of the bigger picture). CX is about delivering exceptional service in every facet of your customer engagement. In a recent Harvard Business Review article, Bruce Jones, the senior programming director at Disney Institute explained CX as such: "Customer experience moves us beyond the traditional definition of customer service—those individual moments when employees are providing direct service to customers. It is also about the bigger picture of what happens before and after these service interactions."

Which brings us to another trend that is reshaping how companies do business, one that has a direct CX impact — speech tech, and more specifically, interactive voice response (IVR). *Speech Technology* magazine recently released some pretty interesting statistics about their customers' projected focus on speech tech usage in the year ahead. One of the most surprising results was the budget projections, with 23% of customers surveyed expecting to spend more than $500,000 and 46% expecting to spend more than $100,000.[2] What are they spending those enormous budgets on? You guessed it! Customer service and CX, 66% and 59%, respectively.[3] That means that all companies should be thinking hard about how much of their own budget they want to invest in customer service tools like IVR if they want to remain competitive.

With both trends playing such an important role in the overall health and success of your business, and with so many competitors making CX and speech tech the focus of their 2018 budgets, it's vital that you begin working immediately to ensure that your CX strategy is making the grade. The first step? Improving your IVR system. In this white paper, you'll find five key strategies to help you optimize your IVR system and improve your CX so you can stay competitive in today's market.

Strategy 1: Evaluate Your Need for a New vs. Updated System

Your IVR system is one of the many faces of your brand and a significant component of your CX. However, many companies neglect to keep tabs on how their system is operating. That's really not surprising. After all, how often do you have to call and engage with your own IVR system for customer service functions? Probably never.

Your customers, however, are using your IVR all the time — and what you don't know can definitely hurt you. Stats from an August 2016 Forbes article titled, *Bad Customer Service Costs Businesses Billions of Dollars* showed that 49% of individuals surveyed switched providers due to poor customer service, and of those, 67% switched more than once. Those numbers reinforce two points: 1. CX is imperative to company success. 2. Your speech tech is imperative to your CX success. So, how do you decide if your IVR is getting the job done? And how do you determine whether you need an upgrade or a new system? Here are four areas to evaluate.

Customers develop a perception of your brand based on their experience with your IVR.

Do You Need an Upgrade or a New System?

1 How old is your existing hardware?

2 How old are your applications/software?

3 Are your calls dropping, customers quitting and complaints rising?

4 Are your customer service reps (CSRs) spending lots of time answering the same questions?

1

How old is your existing hardware?

If your company relies on outdated technology to manage your inbound and outbound calls or it's frustrating for your internal team to perform their jobs because their equipment malfunctions or performs poorly, that's indicative of hardware that is lagging behind.

2

How old are your applications/software?

Your system should be swift, modern and caller-intuitive, as well as easy for your team to learn. For example, push-button interaction should be minimal and your automated voice response should operate smoothly with natural tone and engagement.

3

Are your calls dropping, customers quitting and complaints rising?

If your customers break containment and zero out of your system repeatedly, or your calls are always being dropped, that usually means that there are flaws within your system that require a tune-up. Other indicators your system needs some work:

- ✓ Complaints from customers about their wait time, menu navigation, or ability to communicate with the automated system

- ✓ Challenges with the system, such as improperly routed calls, hang-ups before connection or low call volume

- ✓ CSRs encountering irate customers after they've been routed through the system

- ✓ An unexplained loss of customers

4 Are your customer service reps (CSRs) spending lots of time answering the same questions?

Two ways to discover this are to listen to the calls, or better yet, talk to a few of your most experienced CSRs and ask about the top 10 questions they would like the IVR to handle. These individuals will often have great insights on how to improve customer satisfaction in a cost-effective way.

While many systems can become optimized with a tune-up, there will be occasions in which a system is so old or unintuitive that it's simply better to replace it. Contacting an IVR specialist for an evaluation and IVR testing is very helpful in determining which path to take.

Strategy 2: Tune Your System to Achieve Maximum Performance

If you're fortunate, your existing IVR system won't need to be replaced. All it will take to turn it back into a powerful CX tool is a professional tune-up. Tuning is the most cost-effective way to ensure your system is running smoothly and providing your callers with great service. Typically, a tune-up will fall into three categories:

1. Transcription and Tuning Assessment: A faster tuning cycle that utilizes a smaller number of utterances. The primary goal is to reduce out-of-grammar (OOG) utterances by expanding a grammar or altering a prompt to reduce or remove ambiguity. Discover how simple issues like improper pronunciation, limited vocabulary and even background noises can disrupt your system.

2. Full Scope Tuning: Customized in-depth tuning services that are focused on your precise business requirements and follow best practice guidelines. Go beyond simple grammar and tune-up all back-end operations within the system itself.

3. Adding Features: This option in the tuning process is often considered in addition to other tuning tasks. Ask your call center what 10 features they would like to see included in the IVR system and determine which ones are feasible from a cost and implementation perspective.

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.

Strategy 3: Don't Forget to Include the Human Touch

One of the top complaints from any customer engaging with an IVR system is the distinct perception that they are being managed and offloaded onto a machine. Such perceptions are hardly beneficial to a brand's CX, so it's important that you create your system with a "human touch", and make sure it's an authentic one. In a recent article found on the Harvard Business Review website titled *"The Parts of Customer Service That Should Never Be Automated"*, Harvard associate professor Ryan W. Buell states: "If an action would be seen as annoying when performed by a person, chances are it will be annoying when performed by technology." Here are some ways to ensure your IVR helps your customers without annoying or angering them.
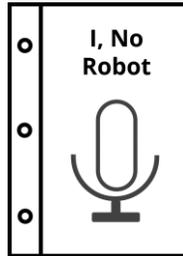
Hire Personable Voice Talent

As has been stated over and over, your IVR system is one of the many faces of your brand. The voice talent you choose to execute your IVR prompts should be friendly, on-brand and engaging. Hire a professional who can manage the speed and tone with ease and help callers feel like they are speaking with an actual person.

Use Solid Scripts

Provide your voice talent with scripts that flow well and reflect the language and emotion that is appropriate for your business. Avoid stilted, overly formal scripts that can make even the best voice talent sound robotic.

Connect Callers to Real People
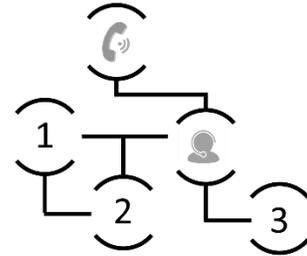
Barring automated services such as bill-pay or simple queries, call routing should always connect customers with a live human, not an answering machine. Additionally, if a caller becomes confused, frustrated or lost in the system, make sure they can easily connect with live support.

To you, an IVR system is a cost-effective way to manage your inbound calls and automate a variety of services that would otherwise occupy your team. However, to your customers, an IVR system is almost considered a necessary evil that must be tolerated. You can make huge strides in reshaping that perception by making your system friendly, easy to work with and, above all, as human as possible.

Strategy 4: Follow the Lead of the Big Players — Even on a Smaller Budget.

The possibility of an IVR upgrade may feel daunting to smaller companies with limited budgets — but it doesn't have to be. For example, as noted above, tuning is far more cost-effective than a system replacement. And there are other small, affordable steps that small-to-medium sized companies can take to compete with the big.

IVR Additions that are Budget-Friendly and Keep You Competitive

Add another language:

Depending upon the region and the type of business you operate, adding another language can be a huge leap forward in improving overall CX. For example, if you live in a community with a large Spanish-speaking population that uses your product or services, adding another language to your IVR will be a huge benefit to your business.

Add outbound services:

Outbound services let you dial out to customers with a single message. Like your inbound IVR system, choose voice and scripting for these calls with care. Outbound services include omni-channel formats like email, SMS, text or postal mail. Tune for emotion and directed dialogue: You can tune your IVR to detect when callers are angry or frustrated and route them to a customer service representative. This simple step elevates your business to that of your competitors.

Offer 24/7 service:

While you probably won't be able to have a live call center like your larger counterparts, you can still design your system to automate some of your services at all times of day, like automated bill-pay or simple inquiries on business hours.

Offer a call-back:

If your reps are all too busy, don't leave people on hold. Create a call-back protocol that allows them to hang up and perform other tasks until someone can get in touch with them.

Putting your IVR system up against bigger players in your industry doesn't require that you invest in expensive upgrades. Small touches like those listed above are budget-friendly additions to your existing system that will keep your customers happy and your company competitive. If you do require new technology, there are less expensive alternatives to the highest-priced and best-known systems. In fact, these solutions are often built on newer and more efficient technologies.

Strategy 5: Use analytics and reports to keep you on top of your game.

To ensure a consistent customer experience for your callers, it's important to establish an analytics and reporting system. A consistent influx of data will allow you to catch problems right away, rather than after they've already begun to decay your brand image and damage your overall CX. Follow these steps to get started:

Establish success criteria for a baseline: A baseline allows you to easily spot when your IVR system is underperforming.

Create a system for recording data: Tracking calls and data can feel overwhelming at first, but an established system will soon become routine. And the results will make the extra effort worthwhile. You can also use an add-on application or an outsourced analytics partner.

Review data frequently: The only way to know your IVR is dipping below your success baseline is to frequently check the recorded data you are gathering against your established success criteria.

Common Data to Monitor and Record:

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 calls placed/resolved?

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

Conclusion

There's no question that CX is a driving influence behind today's marketing strategy. Companies that want to succeed and remain competitive in their industry must work hard to ensure that they use every tool available to deliver a superior experience every time. Optimizing your IVR with tuning, system upgrades and other modifications will turn your inbound calling system to a brand-reinforcing asset that provides your customers with the experience they expect — and deserve. And if you do require new technology, work with experts (like Forty 7 Ronin) who understand all the options – including lower-cost and more-efficient newer solutions.

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.

[1] https://www.gartner.com/smarterwithgartner/key-findings-from-the-gartner-customer-experience-survey/

[2] http://www.speechtechmag.com/Files/Download/SpeechTechnology_MediaKit

[3] ibid.