

How you stay ahead with a self-service strategy.

Are your Speech Self-Services delivering what you need?

The Interactive Voice Response (IVR) market has been around now since the early 1980's and in their early days this was a great means to deliver a service to the residential community to make contact with larger organisation without the need of an initial live agent, typically using Dual-tone multi-frequency (DTMF) or key pad interaction. This however has over time developed into a rather frustrating service with menu systems just getting larger and larger – we have all no doubt had the experience of being offered a whole list of menu options, when calling into a services or utility contact centre, by the time you have got to the end of the list you just can't remember the option which you needed. In fact most users can probably only hold a maximum of 4 or 5 options in their head before they start to get clouded with confusion. None of this is new news to us, and most people I have spoken with have varying levels of “war stories” about ones experience of going into a badly built touch tone (DTMF) IVR where you have no “get out” apart from slamming the phone down and the being forced to start all over again on another day or occasion. Not very good for customer service ratings.

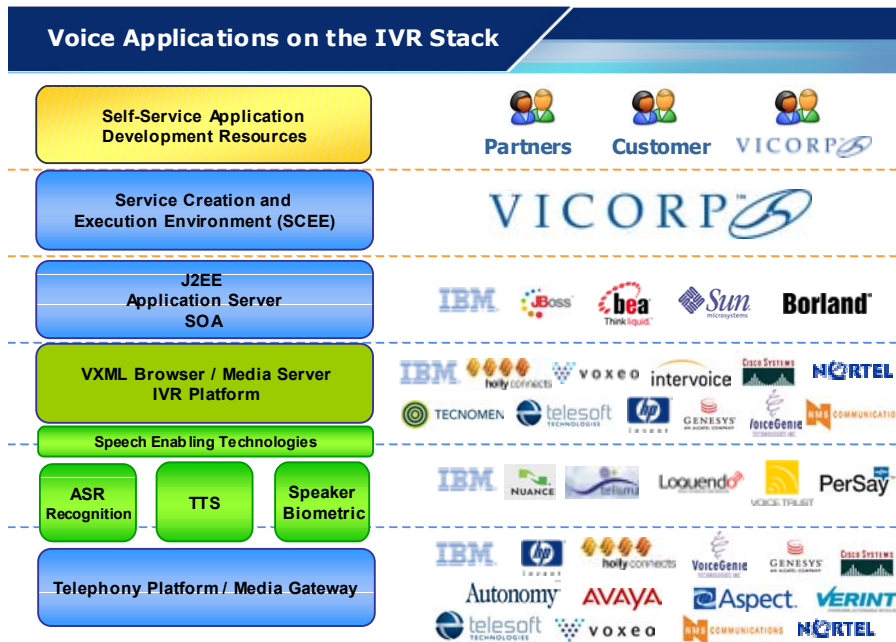
Over the last five to six years the speech side of call centre IVR's has started to take off, mostly driven by the improving levels of speech recognition by the Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR) vendors. This particular area of technology has also had a dramatic change not only in the actual technology capabilities but also from the merging of companies or the growth of newer players coming to market to address this ever-growing demand. Speech has enabled solution suppliers to re-address the customer business requirements, who can now provide more that the limited 0 to 9 restrictions we had with touch tone (DTMF) menus. The biggest concern one should have with speech enabling IVR applications of yester-year is ensuring the creating of new speech services do not use the same mythology or design concepts that were initially used to build the DTMF applications. Speech development needs a strong voice user interface (VUI) to be successful.

There is no benefit to using expensive pre-recorded celebrity voice talent, just to recreate the DTMF menus, they need to be dynamic and configurable and have the flexibility to change as the market demands change. What really needs to be done, is a complete re-think of the needs a business might have for its customers, and then using open, unrestrictive speech technology to create a future proof, portable and cost effective migration from the legacy world some are still “hanging-on” to today to the Next Generation world of self-service, that we as users are all craving for tomorrow.

The thought of having to re-think or build new services, is what is keeping most companies hanging-on to the past, rather than looking to be innovative and delivering what most customers are eager to have access to – that being, a service which clearly articulates what the caller is calling about, and in a language or accent that is close to the language of the user, so therefore geographically dynamic. The business typically looks at legacy services “working just fine today”, so *why change*, and they view any new service as a new cost and if implemented badly could create unnecessary customer churn. It is this attitude that Vicorp are appealing to, to change.

Vicorp have been addressing the supply of IVR solutions for more than 20 years, and supplying a wide variety of self-service applications such as call routing, information & content delivery, and order processing. Vicorp has been clearly focused at speech self-service application enablement sitting on top of open standards VoiceXML allowing value-added solutions to be quickly and easily built and deployed whilst reducing on-going costs. We use an uncomplicated and comprehensive suite of open standard graphical tools with a talented and skilful professional services team that leverage the flow-chart-like drag-and-drop development model.

There are key strategic benefits to using Vicorp's Service Creation and Execution Environment (SCEE), which give users of services created with these GUI tools the following capabilities: IVR platform agnostic multi-tenancy, separation of branding or content from core application logic, easy customisation of "white-label" services, and a true, open-standards architecture. It is the combination of these and other professional services mythology that Vicorp uses to design services that we believe enable customers to reduce their true on-going costs associated with the building and management of new up and coming next generation services.



The IVR platform layer provides the basic functionality for the interfacing of inbound calls, and we believe that the software-oriented suppliers of IVR platforms are well on their way to leading the bunch. Software based solutions tend to be more versatile, are able to change with the market demands and incorporate new and upcoming technology additions quicker. We also see a radical shake up in the industry where IVR vendors now have to be more competitive and need to take advantage of the commoditisation of the hardware server stack. Those IVR vendors that remain focussed at hanging onto their proprietary hardware dependant solutions will be under increasing pressure as customers starts to be more demanding on the open standards approach to delivering speech services.

So how do you stay ahead of the game with your self-service strategies? One key factor I should raise at this point is that in reality there are a large amount of additional hidden costs associated when delivering actual speech or self-service applications. It is in this area that Vicorp believe developers, using feature rich Telco grade GUI SCEE tools, can address the cost of ownership and being an enabler to rapidly producing, deploy and then managing self-service applications.

The important thing is not just the building or development of the services in the first instance but the manageability of those services going forward. Make sure that any costs used in building new services today are also fully portable so that as your IT department commoditise the platform layer or one acquires a business with different IVR platforms the applications are fully portable with little or no additional development required.

Vicorp have had more than 25 years over the legacy years from the early 1980's to the turn of the millennium to learn the lessons within the contact centre and IVR marketplace. Vicorp are strong advocates of **“putting-the-control-back-into-the-hands-of-the-users”**, and are helping to drive the industry into the next big wave of non-proprietary speech self-service solutions. If you have been told by your present suppliers of IVR's or application System Integrators that it is too expensive to migrate or change technologies, then allow Vicorp to come in and talk with you as they are preventing you from moving your business forward. Most of the customers we talk to are in the dilemma of needing to shift their old legacy eight year old IVR server technology, which is invariably coming out of support. They now need to move onto new Next Generation platforms. Vicorp are uniquely well positioned, as we are platform technology agnostic, and are able to advise or make recommendations depending on your requirements or business needs.

Vicorp are also well placed with senior industry specialists and scientists that can assist you with full ROI consultancy reports to prove, any myths not to change, are wrong. What you get out of any consultancy from Vicorp is the choice to knowingly staying where you are today, or enabling you to knowledgeable look at the future. This will place your company in a strong position to change, as the market demands, reducing any potential customer churn.

Visit our web site on www.vicorp.com



*By Craig Ashmole,
VP International Sales & Alliances
Vicorp UK Ltd*