

SpeakUP

Industry Updates from Vocalis

April 2003
Issue 3



With spring on its way here is Issue 3 of the Vocalis Newsletter.

In this issue:

Voice is the main means through which brand values are communicated in the contact centre, we look at the aspects that need to be considered.

Details of how Chelsea Building Society introduced their Call Direct Account customers to a voice driven service.

For those of you that missed The Economist fifth Annual Retail Banking Conference or The Future of Utilities Conference some of the main headlines are outlined.

Some highlights from the "Voice of Business" report are also included and an opportunity to receive the full report.

How to sign up to the Vocalis email news alert.

Please let us know any comments you have, or if you would prefer to receive future editions via email. Contact us by emailing enquiries@vocalis.com

If you would like to see our solutions work, please visit www.vocalis.com or call us on 01223 846177 for more information.

The Persona

Contact centres, as one of the most important customer contact channels, have a key part to play in enforcing and building the brand image and in upholding its values. Voice is the main means through which these brand values are communicated, whether human or automated.

By choosing a voice carefully, considering its tone, accent and style, and using it correctly by designing the most appropriate script, a brand can be upheld and enhanced – or destroyed. By not thinking about this element when building a contact centre solution a business could not only be missing out on an opportunity, but also potentially be damaging its brand. Eighty five per cent of firms consider brands to be their most important asset¹, and with some of the top brands being worth billions it is essential that companies consider all areas that impact the brand.

In any spoken interaction such as a conversation, people communicate much more than just the meanings of the words they use. Through tone, style, speed of speech and pitch a person communicates intentions, mood, emotions and personality. This is called persona.

Therefore when we speak to someone on the telephone, even if it is to a perfect stranger or an automated service, we assess the communication and sub-consciously build a persona for the person to whom we are speaking. Consequently if a strong persona is not purposefully created for a telephone service, customers will often create one themselves.

Given the current challenging economic climate, businesses must work even harder to differentiate themselves from their competitors. Therefore it is vital for a business to present its customers with a persona that is carefully chosen to represent the brand, not a haphazard set of inconsistent characteristics.

The persona can also reinforce and develop a brand in a unique way. Using a telephone service is always a direct experience for the caller and the persona may be the only aspect of a brand that customers interact with – and may even develop a relationship with.

Research shows that callers respond more positively if they sense that the person they are speaking to (whether it is a real person or an automated service) has the right personality for the job².

To this end the persona should be developed in the same way as the rest of the brand; with the profile of a typical customer in mind. By doing this, businesses should assess what the customer wants and their expectations of a contact centre agent or automated system. Once this match has been made customers will be more likely to trust the contact centre agent or the automated system, and so will be more lenient if any problems arise. In such cases callers are also more likely to leave the conversation feeling satisfied and with a good impression of the brand.

The brand persona should be heard clearly through all telephone contact with the customer, in the same way as it should in all other customer contact.

¹ "Brand Risk Management in a value context", Templeton Briefing, An MMC Company

² "Attitudes to voice" – Dialogue Spotlight Research team, Centre for Communication Interface research

The Economist Fifth Annual Retail Banking Conference

The event was held at the Café Royal on March 6th 2003. Margaret Doyle of the Economist Group chaired the event, which saw a number of high profile speakers giving their opinion on how the economy will impact the future of the retail banking industry.

John Windeler, Chairman of Alliance and Leicester, Michael Foot, Director of the Financial Services Authority and Des Crowley, Chief Executive of Retail Financial Services at the Bank of Ireland, discussed the challenges and opportunities in the era of economic uncertainty. As more and more banks push online transactions, John Windeler commented that the Internet is the great leveller between large and small banks. The FSA used this forum to state that they did not believe there is a banking crisis in the UK.

There have recently been many discussions regarding the role that bank branches have to play within retail banking.

Confirming many viewpoints, the Bank of Ireland confirmed they have stopped cuts in the banks branch network, understanding the major role the branch continues to play. Cisco strengthened this point, saying that 50% of profits can be generated in the branch. Although there are new contact channels available, customers want these in addition to the existing channels to be able to use the channel they want depending on their requirement. Vocalis believes that it is therefore important that there is consistency across these channels.



Tim Pile, Chief Executive of Sainsbury's bank discussed the subject of consistent strength of brand within financial services, he confirmed there was a definite weakness of branding amongst the high street banks, however supermarket banks are able to leverage the branding from their parent companies. Innovation in retail banking has redefined the competitive landscape in Europe, however as the final panel discussion confirmed, the real issue is not the technology, it is in the ability to change processes. Innovation does not replace the fundamentals of a business, it is merely a way of doing the fundamentals better.

The Future of Utilities Conference

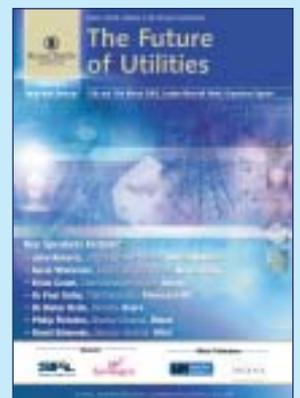
The Future of Utilities Conference was held in London, on the 12th and 13th of March 03, at the Marriott Grosvenor Hotel. The conference had a good attendance, with the keynote speakers coming from some of the UK's largest and most influential utility companies. John Robert, Chief Executive Officer of United Utilities, spoke on balancing low prices with other objectives and evaluating the impact these decisions could have on the competitive marketplace.

Other speakers included Dr Paul Golby, of Powergen, who spoke on the achievement of a flexible company infrastructure to withstand changing market conditions. Andrew Duff, from Innogy, spoke on the realisation of value from a multi-utility infrastructure, in particular looking at how to improve the quantity and quality of information available for customers.

The main theme during day 1 of the conference was the management of resources and the controlling of costs during a down turn in market conditions, issues that were applicable to the audience as a whole.

Day 2 focused on the regulatory environment, specifically the proposed changes coming up. The speaker list featured some of the most influential people in the utilities marketplace regulation environment and covered areas such as PR04, competition and the evolving role of the regulator in the UK marketplace. An outline of the proposed Water Bill is on the back page of this Newsletter.

The conference covered some of the most important areas facing those that are working within the utilities environment and provided an industry view on all of these areas and a chance to debate the issues with industry peers.





CHELSEA BUILDING SOCIETY FIRST UK BUILDING SOCIETY TO LAUNCH VOICE DRIVEN AUTOMATED TRANSACTION SERVICE

Chelsea Building Society is setting new standards for customer service with the launch of its voice driven telephone account service – the first of its kind for a top ten building society in the UK.

The new voice driven telephone account service went live to all Chelsea Building Society's Call-Direct account customers in December 2002. The service enables Call-Direct account holders to transfer money, enquire about their balance and obtain information on recent transactions all by speaking naturally and without needing to talk to a member of staff. In excess of 13,000 calls had been made successfully using the service in the first month.

The solution has been supplied and installed by Vocalis, a leading provider of voice driven solutions to the UK call centre market. Vocalis and Chelsea worked together to cover all areas of the customer experience. This involved Vocalis' expertise in the dialogue design through to the selection of voice for the service in order to ensure the transaction success for the customer.

Tony Wright, General Manager (Systems) from the Chelsea Building Society said: "In the competitive financial services marketplace it is vital that we provide our customers with the highest level of service possible. By introducing this voice driven telephone account service we are able to ensure that whenever a customer calls they receive consistently high levels of service."

"This service supports enquiries at busy times and when new products are introduced. We are confident that this new system will increase the service levels received by our customers."

Paul Wright, CEO at Vocalis said: "We are delighted to be working with the Chelsea Building Society and to assist them in leading the way in customer service for the Building Society industry. I am confident that Chelsea's customers will appreciate the advantages of the new voice driven service immediately. By introducing this service the Chelsea Building Society are allowing their customers easy and direct access to their account information and a natural way of interacting, by simply saying what they want."

Recent research¹ shows that nearly half (48%) of people think that dealing with their bank by phone is a frustrating experience, but at the Chelsea Building Society they are confident that their new automated transaction service will make their customers' experiences hassle free.

Chelsea's new voice activated Automated Telephone Service for Call-Direct customers (T: 0845 601 2710) is available during operational hours:

8.00am – 8.00pm Monday – Thursday
8.00am – 6.00pm Friday
9.00am – 5.00pm Saturday



Alan Butterworth and Tony Wright (left to right)

¹ Research commissioned by Vocalis in 2002



The Water Bill 2003

The Water Bill was presented to the House of Lords in Feb 2003. It had been first proposed at the Water Summit in May 2002 and since then there have been a series of consultations. The Water Bill has been set out to ensure the customer is at the heart of regulation, with the introduction of new consumer objectives for the authority and the Secretary of State to protect the interests of the consumer.

The main features of the Bill include:

- The ability of the Secretary of State to issue guidance on social and environmental matters,
- The ability of the competitions committee to amend, veto licence or appointment modifications following commission reports,
- The ability of the authority, the Secretary of State and the National Assembly for Wales to impose financial penalties
- The duties of companies to publish any links between directors pay and performance.

The Water Bill is made up of 3 parts:

Part 1, and some areas of part 3, fulfil the government's commitment to the reform of abstraction licensing and facilitating the licences in particular to improve the management of water resources, their conservation and sustainable development.

Part 2 of the bill contains the major regulatory provisions including the reform of OFWAT and its conversion into an Independent Consumer Council. It will also enable the extension of the competitive water supply market through new licensing provisions.

Part 3 increases the rights for third parties and their right to lay water pipes and have them adopted by the water undertakers this particularly affects developers.

Congratulations...

...to those who won the hamper full of goodies in the last newsletter issue. We hope you enjoyed the contents and "thank you" to all those who took part in the competition. The answer to the question who opened the Retail Financial Services Forum was Sir Brian Pitman.

News Alert

If you would like to receive an email when Vocalis news is released please send your email address to enquiries@vocalis.com. Please put "news alert" in the subject title. You will then receive email notification of any press release information that Vocalis issues.

Voice of Business Report Headlines

- The main function of the contact centre is to deal with "customer service"
- Top three perceived customer priorities
 - Fastest response
 - Up to date knowledge
 - Getting through to the right person first time
- Customer demands are increasing – over half of the respondents thought their customer expectations are escalating
- Four out of five business said call fluctuations are a significant problem
- Top four staff issues
 - 52% - Morale
 - 42% - Dealing with people
 - 20% - Reducing the number of calls
 - 19% - Boredom

To receive a copy of the "Voice of Business" report email enquiries@vocalis.com requesting your copy and let us know how your call centre issues compare with those in the report.

For further information on Vocalis and the solutions we offer:

Call: (+44) 01223 846177

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