Acer America drives service improvements with hosted speech solutions.

Newest natural language speech recognition technology on hosted IVR platform helps reduce repeat caller rate by 15% and decreases average call time by 50 seconds.
About the company

Since its founding in 1976, Acer has broken barriers between people and technology, enabling users to explore, create and grow. The Acer Group employs 8,000 people across the globe, and revenues for 2013 reached US$12 billion.

The multi-brand strategy allows each brand to offer a unique set of brand characteristics that targets different customer needs in the global PC market. The PC-centric product offering includes notebook and desktop PCs, servers and storage, monitors, projectors, and tablets. Acer is proud to be a Worldwide Partner of the Olympic Movement, including the Vancouver 2010 Olympic Winter Games and London 2012 Olympic Games.

Company
Acer

Business Challenges
– Limitations with hard-coded IVR application
– Out-of-date hosted platform environment

Nuance Solutions
– OnDemand, a hosted IVR solution, for continuous application improvement
– Natural language Call Steering
– Nuance Professional Services for platform migration and ongoing application management and improvement

Results
– 100% uptime with Nuance’s hosted IVR service, 4% improvement over previous hosted service provider
– 15% decrease in repeat caller rate
– 50 second decrease in average call duration
– 10% increase in caller intent capture rate
– Reduction of 30 toll-free numbers
– Expect to realize 60% decrease in cost per minute
The business challenge

In 2006, working with a third-party provider, Acer implemented directed dialog speech recognition in their interactive voice response (IVR) system. According to Nicole Allen, Senior Manager of the Customer Insights Group at Acer America, this initial implementation of speech provided big cost savings.

When Acer subsequently acquired Gateway, the company transitioned to a new multi-brand approach. This created some new challenges in servicing customers.

“When we had a relatively simple environment, everything was working pretty well,” Allen said. “It was a good system. But when we started to add in the other brands and bring in more toll-free numbers and operational groups, it started to get more complicated and much more expensive to maintain.”

The IVR application, which was on a hosted platform, wasn’t providing the flexibility the company needed to grow and modify their service operations.

“We ran into some issues with the application being hard coded,” Allen explained. This limited their ability to quickly and easily implement code changes. Their hosted IVR environment also wasn’t leveraging the most recent Nuance speech recognition technology.

“We weren’t getting automatic platform upgrades, so the provider we were using was on an older version of the Nuance Recognizer. We couldn’t get as much data out of the system as we wanted, and there were limitations around the speech recognition capabilities and what we could do with intelligent call routing.”

These technical challenges presented an opportunity to fully re-evaluate the customer experience and assess what additional changes were needed.

“We started realizing our real business challenge here is how do we continue to improve the customer experience?” Allen said. “How can we increase our capabilities and do it with less cost?”

The company wanted to continue using a hosted platform, because of the minimal IT support required. However, they knew they needed to overcome the current challenges they were facing. After a three month discovery process, Acer decided to partner with Nuance for their customer service solutions and move to Nuance’s hosted service. Nuance’s hosted service always provides access the most recent Nuance technology. Acer would also receive the support and insights of the Solutions Performance Team, who continuously evaluate improvement opportunities.
The solution

In 2011, Acer migrated their English language IVR application servicing US and Canada to the Nuance OnDemand hosted solution. The application identifies the caller’s intent, captures product serial numbers, and captures the caller’s ANI to identify them and effectively manage repeat calls.

As part of the migration, Nuance Professional Services made a number of improvements. First, the application was re-written in VoiceXML (VXML), a standard that enables portability. Second, because they migrated to Nuance OnDemand which offers the most recent, advanced Nuance speech software, Acer was able to integrate this technology in their application. The new application also uses Nuance’s natural language speech technology to let callers say the reason for the call in their own words. This natural language solution replaced their previous menu-based approach. Additional incremental enhancements were also implemented.

“Nuance’s hosted OnDemand solution offers a real competitive advantage to Acer. It provides them access to the newest technologies and Nuance innovations before they’re available on any other platform. They can realize cost savings achieved through enhanced application performance before their competitors. Also, by taking advantage of our Solutions Performance Team, they ensure continuous improvement through incremental modifications. We know that even incremental improvements can translate to significant savings.”

Gregory Pal,
Vice President of Marketing, Strategy & Business Development, Nuance
Hear Sample Calls with the Acer Speech IVR

Routing Calls Correctly with Natural Language Call Steering and Serial Number
– Hear the caller say in their own words the reason for the call: “Checking the status of an order.”
– By collecting the serial number of the product about which they are calling, Acer can confirm if the product is in warranty and should be routed to an agent for support.

Refining a General Caller Request
– Hear the caller says in their own words the reason for the call: “My computer won’t work.”
– The automated solution asks a series of follow-up questions to refine the exact problem and determine how to route the call.

Repeat Call Handling
– Hear how the automated system automatically determines that this is a repeat caller based on their ANI and informs they caller the reason for their previous call.
– If they are calling for the same reason, they are automatically routed to an agent.

Turn up your volume and click on the icons to play audio samples
Nuance Agent Portal Web Tool

To seamlessly connect callers with agents, Nuance also worked with Acer America to develop a web-based tool for agents to retrieve caller information, serving a similar role as a CTI solution.

“We were in the midst of a CRM transition,” Allen explained. “Our CTI solution was tied into that, so it was changing. We didn’t want that to stop the speech implementation, so we were able to come up with a temporary workaround.”

When calls are transferred to agents, they are passed a 5-digit key code which is displayed on their phone’s digital interface. This code is then entered into the Web portal, allowing agents to retrieve information about that call.

“It’s not a fancy CTI integration, but it’s easy to maintain, cost effective, and most importantly, the agents don’t have to ask the customer for the information again, which would obviously be a very poor customer experience,” Allen said.
Real-Time Application Change Tool

Nuance also provides Acer with the Nuance Client Portal, a web-based application that easily facilitates application changes by updating the value of application parameters.

“This has been really helpful for us,” said Allen. “It allows us to update messages the application plays for customers. So, for each brand, we can log into the Portal and select different messaging for customers based on their input. So, if the customer is interested in purchasing an accessory for their PC, the system can be set to automatically play the appropriate message for that.”

Other configuration capabilities provided in within the Portal include easily enabling or disabling certain call flow features and implementing exceptions to, or overriding, the standard call routing.

“We have routing tables we can load into the application that can override standard routing. This allows us to route calls on certain products with specific part numbers to special service groups if needed,” Allen said. “We have special rules for customers who call from a business with the same ANI or phone number. While they may appear to be a repeat caller, they are not. With this type of exception routing we can recognize that and treat the calls appropriately.”

It also allows Acer to create groups of their toll-free numbers, and then set application parameters for each group.

“Our IT group uses this ‘dialed number’ piece of the application,” Allen said. “This has helped them quite a bit in terms of configuring the DNIS groups and the hidden numbers.”

The Portal also provides an interface to Nuance’s OnDemand Insight, a reporting and analytics tool. It includes a high-level dashboard as well as detailed reports.

“Our business groups use the OnDemand Insight reporting,” Allen said. “It allows us to drill into statistical information and conduct more detailed analysis on our calls.”
Results

Since moving to Nuance OnDemand, Acer has achieved impressive results in operating efficiencies. These include:

– Reduction of 30 toll-free numbers
– 100% uptime on Nuance’s platform, 4% improvement over previous platform provider
– 15% decrease in repeat caller rate
– 50 second decrease in average call duration
– 10% increase in caller intent capture rate
– Expect 60% decrease in cost per minute to be realized after amortized service fees for non-recurring development cost

“We attribute the 15% reduction in repeat caller rate to be primarily due to the improvements in recognition,” Allen said. “Average call duration has also decreased. This is partially due to removing some of our automated troubleshooting, since we found that most of those customers were still transferring to the call center. The improved call flow itself and the improved recognition has also helped with the duration.”

All these improvements translate into dramatic savings. “Our cost savings per minute could be upwards of 60%, which is really exciting for us,” Allen said.

Nicole Allen,
Senior Manager, Customer Insights Group at Acer America

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Real-world advice

Nicole Allen with Acer shares advice for platform migrations.

– **Joint development approach with Call Center and IT group is critical for success. Test, test and test again.** “We actually did this and it worked really well. We did extensive testing and definitely recommend that, especially with backend system integrations. We did it together, which was even more important than everyone off doing their own thing and logging issues independently. It educated everyone on the process and the issues which helped tremendously.”

– **Take a phased approach to scope and deployment.** “Taking a phased approach to our project scope and deployment worked. We started with a subset of our toll-free numbers and deployed one group at a time. For example, we have a specific phone number for customers who purchase a PC from Walmart. We stood that up one day, monitored it for multiple days, and then continued moving through the list. So far, we’ve deployed in the US and Canada, English only, and we’re looking into some of the other regions.”

– **Accurate call forecasting benefits all parties**
– **Dedicated resources maximize investment and capabilities**
– **Transitioning resources during implementation is not recommended**

“Looking forward in terms of next steps for the future, we plan to continue leveraging Nuance as part of our overall voice of the customer solution as we try to take our customer experience to the next level.

“We use various speech and text analytics tools, but Nuance is a key indicator of where to focus our energies. It helps us understand what’s going well and where the opportunities are as we gather information, analyze it, and feed it back into the product lifecycle in order to keep improving over time.”

Nicole Allen,
Senior Manager, Customer Insights Group at Acer America
For more information

To view more case studies, videos, and what Nuance customers are saying, visit our Customer Success web site.

More information about the services and solutions used by Acer are also available on the Nuance web site, including Nuance’s hosted OnDemand solution, natural language speech technology and Nuance Professional Services.

About Nuance Communications, Inc.
Nuance Communications is reinventing the relationship between people and technology. Through its voice and language offerings, the company is creating a more human conversation with the many systems, devices, electronics, apps and services around us. Every day, millions of people and thousands of businesses experience Nuance through intelligent systems that can listen, understand, learn and adapt to your life and your work. For more information, please visit nuance.com.