**Nuon** perfects its customer service with call steering.

“We thought we had set the bar high, but the success of the Nuance application took even us by surprise.”

**Challenge**
- Handle customers’ questions faster and better - boosting efficiency of the contact centre
- Improve customers’ experience by using open questions to serve them faster and more intuitively
- Have a system that can respond flexibly and simply to changing circumstances such as new products and services
- Reduce the number of transfers

**Solution**
- Nuance Call Steering handles huge variety of customer questions in an adaptive manner
- System can be fine-tuned and adapted by the contact centre itself
- Open-question speech recognition enables customers to use their own words to navigate (rather than incomprehensible jargon), and so access the right employee or self-service application faster
- Optimised look, feel and brand experience for customers

**Results**
- Correct Routing Rate (CRR) up to 95% after just three months
- Transfers reduced by 25%
- Much higher customer satisfaction: NPS score up by six points
- Nuon received 2015 Dutch CQ (Customer Quotient) award for best customer service

**Background**
NV Nuon Energy is part of the international energy concern Vattenfall, one of the largest producers of energy and heat in Europe. Founded in 2006 following the legal separation of its parent company into the energy supplier Nuon and grid operator Alliander, Nuon produces electricity (over 20TWh in 2014), heat, cooling and gas. Operating mainly in the Netherlands, Nuon is one of the top three Dutch energy companies, employing over 4,400 people, and serving around two million consumers, companies and organisations. It also provides energy-related products, services and advice to help customers save energy and improve safety.
About Nuon.
Nuon’s customers want a reliable and preferably sustainable and green energy supply, a good price and good service. This is extremely important for customer loyalty: a survey carried out by Nuon in Scandinavia showed that making customer service 20% more straightforward and accessible increases customer loyalty by as much as 90%. This is a significant factor in Nuon’s continuity, and is why the company is doing everything it can to improve customer service. For example, Nuon was the first utility company in the Netherlands to obtain the COPC (Customer Operations Performance Centre) certificate - a quality label for contact centres.

“Surveys have shown that customers were very dissatisfied with the channel they had to go through to reach the right employee. The old system offered too few opportunities to make the required improvements, necessary to improve the customer experience and also the efficiency of the contact centre. We finally opted for Nuance. They offered the best package at a good price.”
Arnoud Kortes, Program Manager, Nuon Business Development

The business challenge.
Around 2009, Nuon began to face increasing problems with the limitations of its IVR (interactive voice response) system. Customers had to press keys to navigate through a multi-layer menu in order to get through to an employee who could deal with their question. And, as the company has over two million customers, from a structural point of view it had to deal with a wide range of varied and difficult-to-predict questions. This presented Nuon with a serious challenge.

“Surveys carried out at that time showed that customers were very dissatisfied with the process they had to go through to get to the right employee,” explains Arnoud Kortes, Program Manager, Nuon Business Development. “They had to navigate their way through a complicated menu with lots of sub-choices, with the options often expressed in jargon that they didn’t fully understand. What this meant was that, despite going through the whole menu, customers were often ending up in the wrong place, as they didn’t understand the options. Or they got fed up with doing our work for us in the menu and just pressed keys at random hoping to get through to the right employee.”

The system in use at the time offered too few opportunities to make the required improvements to customer experiences and the efficiency of the contact centre. Nuon therefore opted for a completely new IVR system and set up a selection process to choose a supplier. Major starting points were that customers had to be given a much easier, faster and intuitive process. Plus it had to be possible to adapt the system in line with market changes (for example following the introduction of new products or services). Finally, the application had to be platform-independent.

“We finally decided on Nuance,” continues Kortes. “They offered the best package at a competitive price. When we chose the package, we were still independent and we used an Avaya environment. In 2009 we were acquired by Vattenfall and a European contact centre was then set up on the Genesys platform. In 2012, in the middle of the Nuance project, we migrated to Genesys.”

The solution.
The Nuance solution chosen by Nuon is based on natural language call steering. Customers who call are asked an open question and are then sent as quickly as possible, without transfers, to the right destination (the right employee or self-service application). To achieve this, a project was launched to chart the many hundreds of possible questions asked by customers, for example about their energy bills or moving. During this project, Nuance carried out a classification and analysis of customers’ questions along with Nuon process specialists. The application was then created and the speech recognition engine was ‘trained’.

A statistical model was implemented based on language and semantic elements to enable the engine to give the right response to a customer question. Following various optimisation stages the application gradually went live. An important part of this four-month project was the fine-tuning of the audio files (prompts). For example, the system had to be programmed how to ask an open question, how to start a dialogue etc. in such a way that the quality and look and feel perceived by customers were optimal and fitted perfectly with their perception of the Nuon brand.
“We are very satisfied with the Nuance application and we have since, set it up in Germany. However, we are continuing to fine-tune the application and adapt it to suit changes in the market, for example the introduction of new products. This means new terminology which the system yet has to ‘learn’.”

Arnoud Kortes,
Program Manager, Nuon Business Development

Business benefits.
As could be expected, Nuon set up key performance indicators (KPIs) for the new IVR application, the results for which proved surprising. Instead of the planned eighteen-month preparation period, the Nuance system was up and running after just three months. “We thought that we’d set the bar high and that it would be difficult to attain that quality level,” says Kortes.

“The most important KPI is the Correct Routing Rate (CRR): the extent to which the application manages to correctly route a question to the right destination in a single process, with no transfers. Our target was 88%, which we thought was ambitious enough. After three iterations the CRR had already gone up to 95%, which is exceptionally good. So we could have set the bar even higher.”

A consequent 25% reduction in transfers was very welcome to the business. “Transfers are a pure waste of time and also have a negative effect on customer experience,” adds Kortes.

After a few optimisation stages, Nuon’s Net Promoter Score (customer satisfaction score) also rose by as many as six points. “Our measurements are frequent and meticulous. A six-point increase is a huge improvement in customer satisfaction,” concludes Kortes. Nuon’s ambitious approach to transforming its IVR was recognised publicly in November 2015, when the company won the Dutch CQ (Customer Quotient) award for best customer service.

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