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## **The One Problem Companies with IVRs must Address—The Exception**

by Hsuan-min Chou on May 9, 2012

In his article, “Customer support becomes a social service,” (<http://goo.gl/37jbx>) Rob Bamforth, Principal Analyst at Quocirca, a research company, describes situations that befall traditional IVR systems—those calls that fall out of the standard question and answers that a company has designed for its IVR.

The reason they're a challenge is that when a caller has a problem/question that doesn't conform to the IVR's decision tree, the call is transferred to a live agent. This, in turn, uses up resources devoted to agents and not to research, marketing, or the bottom line. These exceptions to the rule are such a big problem that they're no longer becoming exceptions—and companies need to address them now.

### **And he's right....to an extent**

This article is moot, IMHO, simply because companies design IVR decision trees to handle the majority of calls, not

the minority. Mr. Bamforth may be correct in saying companies have gotten lazy by relying too much on automated systems to handle customer calls. On the other hand, traditional IVRs and other automated systems aren't designed to handle unusual events. It would be impossible to take into account every possible scenario.

But what happens when a call falls out of the IVR plan, he asks? That's where stellar and expensive people-oriented customer support comes into play—and those precious dollars.

Can social media be the savior IVR is looking for?

Social media networks like Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, may help offset traditional IVR's short-comings. But contacting SM channels is not much different than contacting support by phone, it's just a different (perhaps more cool and new?) delivery system. You still have to train and pay people to handle these requests. And what will happen when SM channels become overloaded and responses are not immediate? I've already gotten a "thanks for calling, please hold,"-type response from IM support, and had to wait for a bit before getting a response.

**Don't create more channels, use the ones you already have—just better!**

What Mr. Bamforth should be promoting is not to simply create more and more modes of communication, but to advise companies to use solutions they already have and use them better. Such solutions could be to:

- **Design IVRs more sensibly**

Don't count on IVRs to solve all problems, but still design your IVR strategically. It may cost a bit more to design a smart IVR, but it will pay off with satisfied callers/customers. And the most important thing to designing a smart IVR? TEST TEST TEST. Test as many scenarios as you can think of and build your tree off your results.

- **Use live agents to address different audiences**

Go against the tide and let people easily contact a live agent if they want to. I, myself, like interacting with IVRs to get my answers because generally what I want is something fast, easy, and not a lot of silly banter. My MIL, on the other hand, wants to speak to someone *toute-de-suite*, so let her talk to someone and let her go off on tangents about her family.

- **Actively engage with social media**

Social media, though around for about 10 years, is still relatively new when it comes to addressing customer concerns. There's always a story about someone tweeting a negative comment about so-and-so company and to have that company come rushing in to appease, but it's really few and far between—70% of negative tweets don't get resolved, according to eMarketer in its Oct 2011 report, "When Consumers Tweet Complaints, Should Brands Respond?" (<http://tinyurl.com/6rukc5m>).

Be one of those 30%, find those critical hashtagged comments, and engage with your customers. They'll be happily surprised.