

They're talking about you and you need to know what they're saying

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offer the flexibility to be customised for your call centre and performance goals. It's important to consider how and why the recording technology will benefit your business and how it will integrate into your current system.

Call recording systems based on Session Initiation Protocol (SIP) offer much more flexibility than traditional PSTN technology.

Recordings can be married to and searched on multiple combinations of data criteria such as agent, length of call, calling number, etc. And it also allows rules to be set as to when to start and stop recording – for example, as soon as caller and agent are connected to avoid the recording of superfluous information before this.

Call centre formats are changing due to an increase in home and flexi working, multi-site set-ups. And smaller businesses (e.g. e-retailers) are beginning to operate as mini call centres.

So it's no surprise that hosted systems are gaining traction, making it easier to integrate a distributed call centre and reduce upfront capital for the smaller businesses. In terms of call recording, the ability to store files off-site in the cloud makes for much less hassle and no on-site kit. It's particularly attractive for those only recording for compliance purposes.

The next step, following the growing trend of flexi-working is in mobile recording – as call centres are increasingly using mobiles for inbound and outbound calls.

We've seen a growth in the number of mobile recording cloud technologies – especially in the finance sector with FSA compliance deadlines looming. As with any technology that is expensive – and it is – there are some credible and secure open source alternatives emerging for call recording too.

In spite of this, call recording remains at the product level. What we've yet to see is the development of the call recording system – the complete and comprehensive solution that incorporates all compliance factors, all devices and all varieties of call centre format.

For the moment we'll have to watch this space but I think we can expect something extremely powerful when it does arrive.

*James Passingham, CEO and founder, Foehn;
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Take care or you'll face disappointment

THE benefits of speech recognition are well known, from freeing agents for more complex interactions with customers to providing a round-the-clock telephone service cost-effectively.

However realising the benefits is not straightforward and requires very careful



Listen to your customers before it's too late



THANKS to social media, call centres have never been under as much scrutiny from consumers over their service levels. Banks, utilities and phone companies have all made headlines in recent weeks for customer service failings.

While there will always be discontent beyond any company's control, there are some straightforward processes that can be used to mitigate these negative headlines.

With the internet, social media and mobile apps, brands can, quite literally, find themselves in customers' pockets, making it easy for people to build close, two-way conversations with the companies they like best.

For their part, companies also have access to a huge amount of data that ought to provide them with clear intelligence on what's working and what isn't.

But many call centres have not caught-up and mistakes are still being made. Businesses, lost in the mountains of information their databases and analysts provide for them, are losing sight of the insights that could have a big impact on their businesses.

A recent Contact Centre Association study

design and implementation process and practice, covering business, science and art.

This needs a combination of in-house resources and experienced partners to identify the business benefit and put together an effective and realistic system.

It is vital to firstly fully understand and manage the business goals in detail, and then to apply the appropriate technology, all the while ensuring that the caller goals and experience is central within that process.

Poorly performing systems all exhibit a disregard to one or more of these areas.

Your key management decision is to invest high quality resources and investment into the initial business analysis and design stages, with appropriately qualified partners.

For a busy call centre routinely facing multiple internal and external pressures that can appear costly, but it is always far more costly to address system inadequacies subsequently.

The scope of consideration should cover the entire business process, from marketing and customer communications, service delivery, ICT and back office services, staff training, management and reporting, post-deployment services.

While speech recognition systems are fundamentally IS projects – and need to follow the best practices of that industry – it is important to recognise that specific and significant processes and skill sets are additionally required.

For example, optimal designs of speech services will benefit from call centre and

showed that businesses are striving to better understand their customers – nearly three quarters of respondents wanted to know how they could make customers happier. It seems that they don't fully understand "what customers are saying" and what action they need to take to make things better.

Yet listening to and acting on customer issues is something call centre managers can keep tabs on and act on quite quickly. The key is having a formal process for tracking and analysing what customers tell companies about their services and offering, which is where "voice of the customer" analytics can be vital.

By using this technology, the voice of the customer can finally be heard, analysed and turned into actionable intelligence. This can not only provide invaluable, insight into the customer's experience, but also offer a wealth of understanding which could help transform the business, from uncovering customer suggestions on how to improve the business' offering to highlighting and mitigating customer frustration which can fast spread across social media to become a threat to a brand or regulatory compliance.

It also helps companies to gain a better understanding of where broken processes may be in the back-office, creating avoidable customer service calls or issues. This, for many organisations, represents the largest opportunity for significant improvements in cost reduction and operational excellence.

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usability studies, both pre- and post-deployment; carefully controlled pilots and escalating deployments can be very important; finally, speech systems can often require periodic post-deployment tuning services.

A key factor to success is the selection of a partner who has demonstrable experience in delivering a range of effective systems with key skills in IT project delivery, speech technology, customer-centred design, effectively acting in a partnership relationship to guide the engagement through to success.

This is essential whether or not your supplier creates a customer hosted solution, or provides hosting or managed services, where there is an intrinsic motivation to deliver continued value and performance.

The biggest challenge for speech recognition technology is a history of poorly designed applications and ill-defined requirements leading to disappointing unrealistic outcomes.

The future of the technology is that it will find its own appropriate level in a unified mix of communication technologies. As customers become used to improved integrated, personalised cross channel experiences driven by customer data, the need for extraneous menu choices will disappear and unnecessary steps will become a vague uncomfortable memory of the old days.

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