

IVR and on-hold messages: are they fit for purpose?

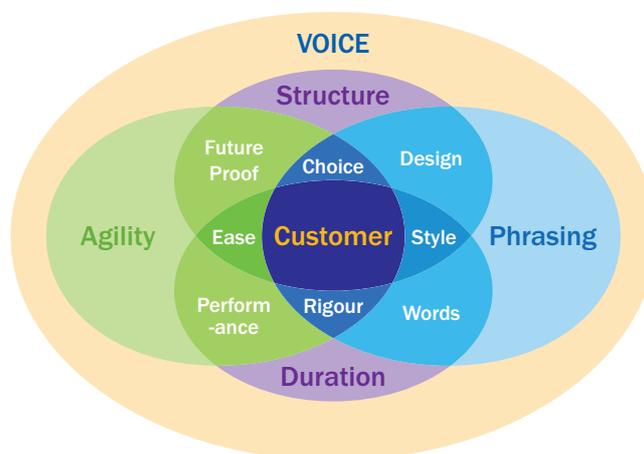
A surge of interest from members shows the importance of not treating anything in isolation – there are many factors that influence success, for customers and the business. Phil Anderson reveals the new best practice model.

It's been a great year for IVR with inspiring case studies from two innovation award finalists, [TalkTalk](#) and [Three](#), and a surge of interest from members following our first IVR-specific workshop in October. Crucially, the more we have discussed best practice and considerations for IVR the more we have understood why it's so easy to make mistakes.

As a result, for 2014 we are proposing the first Best Practice Model (see diagram) and invite your comments as we develop and refine it during the year. As Nick Herbert puts it "if we assume our IVR is technically solid and the network has enough capacity then the only reason callers are failing to reach the right place first time is down to how the IVR has been designed and scripted". Nick is a Director at [Adexchange](#) and keynote speaker at our 2014 conference.

Structure is the first consideration. What is the purpose of your IVR? This should be the starting point before mapping out the structure and design; consider what choices you want to offer, and why. It's also vital that you plan to be agile and future proof from the outset and that you consider ease of use for your customer. As Kenny Lang at [Three UK](#) has found, customer insight and understanding are fundamental – "what drives their use of our IVR? and what influences behaviour?"

Having a clear purpose for IVR will help you understand the different customer journeys. If you want to use your IVR primary for self-serve, make these options easy to use and at the highest possible point of the IVR layers. If you want to deflect your customer to another channel,



A best practice model for IVR and on-hold messages

e.g. website, again mention this as early as possible, don't design the journey to only inform your customer after 3 or more levels.

You also need a clear understanding of business objectives and balance these with the needs of customers. At [TalkTalk](#), Sarah Bramwell provides self-service opportunities that are "simple and easy for customers to interact with", making sure that their "engagement strategy is thought through from the offset... understanding the reasons for contact and customer call drivers." A short and simple IVR will give better results than a long, complex one – delivering customers to the right place first time or maximising self-serve for example.

Consider who your customer is and how many choices they will need to make. It is not unusual for IVR options to be created for the purpose of internal MI/data; you need to carefully consider the value of this over potential customer frustration. It may be a difficult decision to make, but you may have to accept that some call types can't be split in your IVR without developing the use of natural language.

When designing IVR it can be useful to assume the caller isn't paying full attention. As Nick Herbert has found: "English may be their second language, they may have poor reception on their mobile, they may not have perfect hearing, they're probably doing something else at the same time and they almost certainly don't want to interact with a machine".

On the other hand when considering the journey time through IVR, you need to assume that customers will listen carefully to all the options. As Richard Eva at [Advitel](#) points out "improving your IVR doesn't necessarily mean altering the journey your callers take. It can be as simple as changing the wording of your options and reducing the length of each message to limit journey time to a minimum."

The choice of language is the next critical success factor, but be sure you have understood structure and design before you start as these work hand-in-hand. A rigid structure could restrict the phrasing and increase the length of messages and customer journey time. Internally used phrases, abbreviations and

corporate speak may be understood by you, but is this the language of your customers?

Use the wrong words (in the wrong order) and it doesn't matter how much you've invested in the technology or how long you spent designing the structure – callers will simply hit the wrong buttons (or no buttons at all). Our words must be short, simple and to the point. They should also represent your organisation and brand values. "Here we strike a balance between customer, brand image and business need", suggests Kenny Lang at [Three](#). The length of phrases will affect the duration of the customer journey.

Don't leave phrasing until the last minute or give it to someone with little experience. Remember too that the spoken word is different to the written word. In particular, using customer language will help connect with the caller and help them make the right selection first time. Kenny Lang offers this example: "If you're having difficulty with your device or the network' is business phrasing. We find better accuracy rates if we say 'If you've got a problem with

your phone or signal'. This is customer language."

You also need to be able to react to changes in the market or influences beyond your control, as Sarah Bramwell explains. "Weather related issues or a new proposition to compete in the market place require us to be flexible in our approach to messaging or new customer journeys. We can script and professionally record a message within 24 hours. We also have the ability to create and upload immediately if required, utilising internal voice artists".

Finally, Richard Eva has this advice: keep reviewing your IVR. "You'd be surprised how many improvements can be made". In particular he

suggests that speech analytics is a big opportunity for feedback – "customers will talk to the IVR and tell it what isn't clear" – and that we involve our agents, as they hear about IVR from customers directly. "Feedback is at times bruising, but it does highlight patterns or trends that can then be used to improve the IVR journey".

Thanks to all who have contributed to the IVR discussion during 2013 and 2014. Special thanks to Nick Herbert, Director at Adexchange, Richard Eva, Director of Sales & Marketing at Advitel, Sarah Bramwell, Head of IVR and Telephony at TalkTalk, and Kenny Lang, IVR Manager at Three UK.

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IVR Structure

- Test how well it works for customers**

- Keep it simple

- Can callers reach their destinations in no more than 3 steps?

- No more than 3 or 4 choices in each menu?

- Don't assume the caller will listen carefully to all the options

- Don't assume that some call types cannot be split in IVR

- Natural language IVR opens more options for routing

IVR Metrics

How do you know your IVR is working?

- Deflections, positive abandonments
- Customer journey time
- Wrong button, or no button press
- Transfers
- Self-serve rates
- OOH messages
- Call avoidance
- IVR abandonments

On-Hold Messages

What is the purpose of your on-hold messages? Engage, inform or sales?

Will people will feel they are on longer then they think?

Top Tips:

- Know your audience
- Make sure your message fits your brand
- Don't plan for average
- Queue position or average wait time? One size doesn't fit all?
- Engage Callers

Digging Deeper on this topic



Online resources
read the longer article and see conference presentations.

Best practice
join our next events or contact us for specialist support.



Case studies
Learn more from TalkTalk (pg 85) and Three (pg 87).




For more information visit our website: ppf.bz/IVRKeyTopics