

Stepping-stones to success with speech analytics

In 2010 just a quarter of Planning Forum members were investigating the use of speech analytics. Today there is a clear appetite to adopt the tool but people are still very unsure of the basics. This articles asks industry experts the five most frequently asked questions.

Speech analytics has come a long way in the past four years. Back in 2010, when the Professional Planning Forum first conducted research on the topic, just a quarter of its members had started examining the technology's potential. Fast-forward to 2014, and it's a different story. Today, there are several compelling case studies illustrating the business benefits from a customer experience and efficiency standpoint – some of them Innovation Award winners.

But while these early adopters are taking advantage of the technology, others remain uncertain of how to capitalise on it. A recent poll conducted by the Forum during its ongoing speech analytics education programme with Nexidia, for example, revealed a clear appetite to adopt the tool. Yet over 80% of respondents said that they aren't at the stage of developing the most popular applications.

The reasons for this became apparent at a special speech analytics clinic at this year's Customer Strategy and Planning Conference; people are still unsure of the basics.

Here, we outline the five most frequently asked questions during that clinic, together with answers from the specialists.

Q: Do vendors have standardised categories we can use during a proof of concept?

A: There are standard categories, explains Chris Thomas, sales director EMEA at technology provider CallMiner, but most vendors will work with clients or prospects to fine-tune these during an initial

pilot. "A standard category might focus on empathy, he says. "But if you're a pensions provider, for example, you'll probably need to evaluate two types of empathy – one focusing on the level of understanding and responsiveness shown to a policy-holder, and a second focusing on the sensitivity shown to someone who's rang up in the event of a policy-holder's death."

"They're very different types of empathy – both important," continues CallMiner colleague, business analyst, Nick Rowe. "A good way of working out what to focus on is to get frontline people involved during a proof of concept. They deal with customers every day, and are best-placed to identify what categories are needed."

Q: How can I prove the benefits of speech analytics to get board-level buy-in?

A: The best way, says Chris Rainsforth, customer experience and quality specialist at the

Professional Planning Forum, is to start with a discrete project where it's known that problems exist. "Look for something where it will take relatively low effort to implement, but will derive high value for your organisation. Our research has shown that focusing on analysis of call drivers – with a view to preventing avoidable contact – is both low effort and high value. The same goes for projects looking at reducing repeat calls."

Using data from categories built around these themes to influence change in operational practices can result in cost-benefits in a relatively short timeframe, he says, which can then be used as quantitative evidence to show directors that the data can be trusted.

"When the board see it as a trusted source of data, you won't have to keep justifying the technology spend," he adds.

Example reports from Awards finalist City Park Technology



<http://ppf.bz/ppfSpeechTopics>

Q: We've decided to invest in the tool, but need to find the right people to manage it. What skills and qualities should we look for in a speech analyst?

A: Charmaine Vallance-Poole, head of customer experience at 2014 Innovation Awards winner Neopost UK, is clear on this point. "You need someone who ideally used to be an agent; someone who really understands what the frontline job involves so they can apply that knowledge to build categories that are useful to the operation," she says. "Also, having someone who's come from the operation puts them in a better position to communicate why they've focused on particular categories and what the findings tell us. If they can make that communication creative, even better."

Krzym Leskow, Pre-sales Consultant at technology firm Genesys, agrees. "Also look for a problem-solver: someone who can work as a change agent," he adds. "That's important to add into the mix."

Q: Where should speech analytics sit in my organisation? Who should manage it?

A: According to CallMiner's Nick Rowe, much depends on the size of the organisation implementing it. Larger organisations might create a dedicated speech analysis function within their customer insight team, he says, while smaller ones could give management remit to the quality team.

Regardless of who has jurisdiction, though, successful practitioners agree that the operation needs to be involved.

"Engagement across the business is critical," explains Jason Gingell, senior business analyst for speech analytics at 2011 Innovation Awards

winner British Gas. "You need an 'owner', and having a centralised insight function is sensible to ensure outputs are disseminated in a managed way. But don't forget there needs to be transparency around what speech analytics is there to achieve, and the role different people can play in making it successful. You have to bring advisors, team managers, quality, business improvement – all areas – on board."

Q: How far can we go with speech analytics, and how quickly?

A: Both vendors and practitioners agree that speech analytics' potential is infinite. However, the key is not to rush into too many projects at the same time. "Once there's

board-level buy-in, there can be a tendency for people to see speech analytics as a panacea. But you have to control that view," warns Neopost UK's Charmaine Vallance-Poole.

"Ultimately, while your potential to change is limitless, your ability to make those changes isn't," advises the Planning Forum's Chris Rainsforth. "Even if you've got a large team of analysts, there's only so much you can do at once before you hit bottlenecks in either analysis, operational change or both."

A measured approach is critical, adds British Gas' Jason Gingell. "Focus on one topic at a time – especially at the outset," he adds.

Ask the expert...

How can you test speech analytics' capability?

We started with a compliance-focused pilot, coaching a test group of experienced agents using data from [speech analytics] and comparing that with the results we got from manual compliance quality assessments alone. We then did the same with two new groups of recruits. In both test groups where speech analytics was used, compliance rose significantly, which is how we knew the technology worked.

Will speech analytics show you where your processes are falling down?

I see it as a means of opening up a call, but the amount of MI it produces is phenomenal. It won't tell you immediately where your processes aren't working. You have to build categories to uncover limitations in the different building blocks of each process, and then use that information to reengineer the process once you've understood it in its entirety.

Can speech analytics substitute human beings when it comes to quality analysis?

The technology takes away subjectivity. If you're focusing on compliance, for example, it sees things in black and white – a pass or a fail. But I'd never sign something off as a pass without having a human being review the call... Ultimately, we use speech analytics to decrease risk. But that doesn't replace human ability to evaluate the nuances of language.

Douglas Kimbley, MI specialist, City Park Technologies (2014 Awards finalist)