

# You can listen, but now you can learn what your callers are really saying

Trawling through hours of calls takes time and will not give you a true picture of how your call centre and your company are serving customers. Speech analytics is the answer, say our experts – and they have some innovative ideas.

## You know what they're saying, but what do they mean?



THE potentials for speech analytics (SpA) are enormous – but only for those who accept it as an enabler for a solution rather than a product which will deliver on its own. Current costs mean that Rol for SpA is limited to medium-large contact centres.

Call centres already recognise the need to listen to what's going on. Voice and screen recording and quality management have been available for years and continue to evolve and deliver good results and Rol.

But the more savvy contact centres are also questioning the content of their calls. The cost of communication is high, therefore

unnecessary or inefficient communication should be reduced. Competition is high, so knowing how customers react to offers and service is important. If the worst happens and customers complain then the ability to analyse and rectify the causes will ensure customer satisfaction.

For companies with high call volumes SpA offers the ability to analyse the content of their calls efficiently and consistently.

Current solutions utilise three technologies to categorise calls:

**Keyword spotting**, probably the most common and most cost-effective, enables calls to be categorised automatically by looking for those containing certain words or phrasing. These calls can then be manually evaluated, used for coaching or used as part of root cause analysis. Set-up and configuration costs can be in the range of £10,000s, depending on the scale of the call centre. Currently this should be considered the entry level SpA and where most companies are likely to see a Rol.

**Phonetic indexing** is the next level of

sophistication. This requires more detailed processing to translate calls into a database of phonemes. It is slower than keyword spotting and uses a lot more disk space, but it does allow faster repeat searches once the phoneme translation has been completed.

**Speech-to-text transcription** is the most expensive and the most powerful. Calls are automatically transcribed into text files which can be analysed quickly and as many times as you like. It relies on a high level of accuracy which can only be delivered by training the system to recognise words in the specific call centre domain. This training requires a lot of manual interventions, so the time and cost of implementing speech to text can be high, typically £100,000-plus.

The speed of SpA results is one of the areas which are likely to improve. Current solutions are post-process, which means the results are available some time after the event depending on the resource available to analyse the calls. In future this is likely to speed up to the point where near real-time is available.

In the future we're likely to see the emergence of more sophisticated SpA which will allow age or gender spotting. Imagine being able to determine the age of your caller, in real time, and route them to customised services.

*Mike Murley is sales director of ASC Telecom UK; m.murley@asctelecomuk.com*

## Let them listen the easy way



MOST organisations which sell over the phone are required to record calls – for very good reasons. Customer disputes are all too common and call centre liability is substantial. Specific disclosures must be read as a part of the transaction and the proof of compliance with this process must be available in a form of verbal receipt.

For example, a specific marketing agency will allow listening to recordings if the client asks for it.

In one actual example, a credit card holder disputed a charge for extra protection which had appeared on his bill (he must have agreed in an earlier call).

The agent said she could cancel the protection plan and refund one month, but the client wanted all of the months refunded. He was told this was not possible, he had agreed to the extra protection.

The customer then insisted on proof – he wanted to hear the recording where he had agreed – and the agent said she could

provide the refund and resolve the dispute.

Common practice in situations like this is to burn the recording onto a CD and send it to the customer. Some have the capability to email it to the customer as well. However, sending out an actual audio file and leaving it in the hands of a customer requires a series of approvals within a call centre – as a minimum, by a legal department, supervisor, and a QA manager. Inevitably, this runs up the cost of call resolution and stretches the wait time for the customer, which impacts customer satisfaction (and provides opportunities for negative word of mouth until the issue is finally resolved).

Now, there is a new technology, in the form of a "perishable PIN number" which provides a practical solution. This is how it works: the agent sets up access to the recording (in accordance with the call centre's policy) and assigns to it a PIN number that expires after a period of time determined by the agent.

The customer can then listen to his/her original call simply by dialling into the call centre recording system via any phone line. The secure-access PIN will then automatically trigger playback of that one recording. All of this can be taken care of within seconds of the customer request. Handled once and dealt with.

## On premise vs. hosting: now there's a third choice



THERE'S traditionally been a big difference between the dialler you buy and the hosted version. With the first you would expect to have a more integrated and effective dialler but the cost would need to be swallowed upfront. With hosted you would pay very little for the dialler but pay as you go for the minutes.

In call centres the biggest cost is people and the minutes. With a hosted dialler the up-front technology cost is lowered, but to access the system you'll need to be logged in all day (that's a telephone call you pay for) with call minutes on top, charged at a higher rate by the supplier. What that means is that hosted diallers are often more expensive, but the additional cost isn't always visible, as call minutes tend to come from someone else's budget.

But it's no longer a binary choice. What's changed is the ubiquity of the data centre. Customers no longer need to worry about how and where they host their data if