

Interview with Nick Ezzo, TuVox

Sometimes, the caller saying less is more

Nick Ezzo, director of marketing, TuVox, was interviewed by Bill Meisel in late February. Nick is a contact center professional who “grew up” in the call center, holding positions from call center agent, ACD/IVR administrator, Business Applications Consultant, and just about everything in between. Nick’s experience with hundreds of contact center projects has proven invaluable in his current role of Director of Marketing for TuVox.

Please outline TuVox’s strategic focus and the company’s product and service offerings.

Although TuVox started life as a speech recognition company, our focus has broadened to encompass other technologies that provide a fast, seamless, interactive caller experience. Today, speech is just one method (albeit a very important one) to interact with callers. Recent TuVox customers have implemented IVR-to-SMS, proactive outbound, sophisticated personalization through CTI, and even touch-tone when it makes sense.

You might have noticed this change in late 2007, when we changed our tagline from “Speech Within Reach” to “Get The Experience.” We believe that the caller experience leads to direct business benefits, and we have many different ways to streamline calls and reach out to customers.

Please give some specific examples of customers and what you’ve done for them.

One of the nation’s largest movie theater chains one-upped their competition by adding the ability to save data (favorite theater, etc.) to streamline calls and by adding SMS interactivity with callers. They realize that their calling population is young, mobile, and tech-savvy, and we created an application that reflects that. Not only is this a high-volume application, it is a showcase for how to use technology intelligently.

A corporate travel company with Fortune 500 clients uses TuVox to automate travel itinerary review, trip changes, and routine inquiries. It allows the agents to focus on the hard stuff while the application handles the ordinary stuff. Agents are happy and callers are helped faster.

TuVox has done work in personalization of customer service using such means as the caller’s ANI (Automatic Number Identification). Can you discuss the potential for this approach and give specific examples?

After 20+ years, we have finally reached a point where we can unlock the power of ANI and CTI. Historically, the big obstacle to ANI adoption has been the home landline, shared by multiple people. Well, now that every man and woman (and child, it seems) has some kind of mobile device, your phone number is matched to *you*. And, with cell phone portability, your number can be permanent.

What this means for companies is that they can provide an unprecedented level of personalized customer service to their callers, more so than even a human agent can provide.

For example, TuVox created a sophisticated application for large North American airline that is a kind of “speechless speech app.” The system recognizes the caller’s ANI, does a lookup while the phone is ringing, and greets the passenger by name. Based on the most recent information in the system, the system will give flight status, baggage info, and other details. The interesting part is that many callers will hang up without saying a word. Now that’s an intelligent app.

How does TuVox work with partners to deliver solutions?

We have always had a vibrant partner strategy in many different areas, but our closest partner is **Genesys**. Not only have we standardized on GVP in our hosting centers, but we also approach customers jointly with a comprehensive solution that includes speech, text messaging, CTI integration, and outbound solutions. Their strengths complement our strengths, and we have had a great deal of success together.

Any final comments?

TuVox is acutely aware of the economic issues facing companies today. In the near future, we will be unveiling new programs that allow companies to streamline calls and save money as quickly as possible. We've also gotten creative on how to reduce any risk associated with a new system implementation. Look for more to come on that front.

VUI Visions

The Evolution of Speech Technologies in Warehouse Voice Picking

Doug Brown, VP, Product Management & Marketing, Datria

*In this guest column, we ask designers skilled in creating Voice User Interfaces to highlight a particular aspect of VUI design inspired by actual deployments. In this issue, Doug Brown, vice president of product management & marketing at **Datria** discusses the breadth of speech technologies used in the past dozen years to voice-enable warehouse applications. The in-depth article presents an interesting evolution of the technologies used in a difficult problem that many don't realize has been one of speech recognition's earliest successes, both for vendors and the companies that buy it.*

All three generations of technology offer a viable approach to today's supply chain automation, and Doug examines the reasons behind the diversity in approaches, pros/cons and recent trends, basing his article on discussions with colleagues as well as his own extensive experience. Doug became involved with speech recognition technologies at the Conversant Systems startup venture at AT&T in the mid-80s. His current work at Datria focuses on an ever-increasing set of packaged speech applications automating mobile employee processes (including warehouse workers). Datria was formed in 1997 as a spin-out of Lockheed Martin, and has been delivering multimodal data collection and field service solutions over the past 10 years. Significant customers include Johnson Controls, Bell Canada, Coca-Cola Enterprises, Energy South, TELUS, and Cardinal Health. Datria has partnerships with SAP, Cisco (e.g., SSN, May 2008, p. 27), and Nuance (among others).

Over the last 10 years, the most widely known speech recognition application for many has been self-service in the contact center. Lately this has been changing, as speech recognition (voice user interfaces) has started becoming more prevalent in consumers' lives. People now talk to their navigation systems, to 411 information services, to their PCs, to the music systems in their cars, their cell phones (voice dialing and text-message creation), to corporate systems for password reset, for Google and Yahoo voice search, and so on. The unique hands-free, eyes-up attribute of a speech interface is becoming increasingly appreciated, especially as people are "always-connected" while mobile and away from a desktop interface.

Voice picking in the warehouse – once a niche market filled with specialty point solutions and proprietary technologies – is another example of companies using speech technology outside of the contact center. While not as well known as some speech applications, it is a burgeoning market with greater than \$400M end-user spend in 2008 (*"The Guide to Voice Solutions in Warehouse Environments,"* Daniel Hong, Datamonitor, February 2009).

An unusual characteristic of the voice picking market is the range of varying speech technologies at play – embedded capabilities versus network speech, speaker-dependent versus independent, adaptive technologies versus fixed voice templates, etc. This article looks at why different speech recognition approaches exist, and their relative pros and cons. It is important for the reader to know three things:

- A 2009 voice picking deployment can be successful using any of the approaches discussed below.
- With today's technologies, most misrecognition issues are rooted in user behaviors and are not caused by technological shortfalls.
- Regardless of vendor marketing, no speech recognition technology works 100% of the time for 100% of the users.