

Avoid the Voice Response Backlash Top 10: Update 2006

Elaine Cascio & Linda Van Doren, Vanguard Communications

We wrote the original version of this article 10 years ago. To this day, it's one of the most downloaded from our website, and is still incredibly relevant. Here's my favorite sentence from the original article; *"It's not the technology, but how it's implemented that will make or break an application."* Many of us prefer to self-serve when it's easy and well-designed. When systems are designed and implemented in caller centric ways, voice systems can provide valuable information and applications. As a result, there are some callers who may choose NOT to speak with a human 100% of the time. The key is to give customers choice of how they want to do business with you and not force them to speak with someone any more than you would force them to use an automated system. So here's the first installment of Vanguard's 2006 Top Ten Tips for designing caller-friendly, effective voice response applications.

1. Know your callers and design applications with them in mind. Make sure you understand what callers want and what applications they find useful.
 - ◆ Design to your demographics.
 - ◆ Conduct focus groups.
 - ◆ Focus on quick hits.
 - ◆ Perform usability testing.
 - ◆ Involve your agents when designing applications.
 - ◆ Use a voice and scripting that reflects your corporate image and is pleasing to callers.
2. Let callers feel in control.
 - ◆ Always provide a way for callers to reach an agent by saying "agent" or by pressing 0.
 - ◆ Help callers feel successful: always blame mistakes on the system and not on the caller.
 - ◆ Allow callers to repeat, pause, skip ahead, and move forward and backward as appropriate.
3. Align IVR applications with your overall self-service strategy. Don't look at the IVR in a vacuum. Application should complement the web, customer materials, interactions with representatives, etc., as a part of the overall customer contact experience.
 - ◆ Put only the most appropriate applications on your IVR. Use other channels for complex, lengthy applications like filling in forms or retirement projections.
 - ◆ Keep wording and transaction steps (like security) consistent across channels. Listen to your agent calls, and review your website for language choices.
4. Make the system easy and familiar for callers. Reflect how agents handle "live" interactions, and design application to be intuitive for users.
 - ◆ Keep prompts short and to the point.
 - ◆ Put the most commonly requested choices first on your menu. From there, keep choices logical.
 - ◆ Don't embed multiple choices in a single menu option.
 - ◆ Limit the number of choices to a maximum of five (ideally 3) options per menu.
5. Talk to callers, don't write at them. Scripts that sound like writing are stilted and discourage callers.
 - ◆ Always read your script aloud before it's recorded, and test it with a mix of people.
 - ◆ Time prompts and options to reflect normal conversation.

- ◆ Limit concatenation wherever possible. Test all concatenated prompts to make sure they sound natural.
- ◆ Avoid using acronyms or technical jargon that your callers may not understand.
- ◆ Use simple, more commonly used words, like “stop” instead of “terminate” and “about” instead of “pertaining to.”
- ◆ Keep informational messages and legal disclaimers short. Eliminate them if you can.

Stay tuned for our next installment for the remaining top 5; which include use of IVR technology, measurements and metrics, and the unique challenges of speech recognition.

Elaine Cascio is a Vice President at Vanguard Communications Corporation, a consulting firm that specializes in contact center processes, operations and technology. She heads Vanguard's self service practice. Linda Van Doren is a consultant at Vanguard. For more information, visit us at www.vanguard.net or contact Elaine at ecascio@vanguard.net or Linda at lvandoren@vanguard.net.