



Benefits of Interactive Voice Recognition (IVR)

This council had embarked on a programme of transformational change to improve customer satisfaction and enquiry resolution at the first point of contact, but was facing a number of issues with both internal and external communication arising from the high number of calls and limited staffing.

Although there was a separate line, with an automated touch-tone facility, provided for councillors, staff working remotely, suppliers, and friends and family, to use to contact people within the council, many calls were still going through the central switchboard. This was because the touch-tone system required callers to know the extension number of the person they were trying to reach. As callers often did not have this information to hand, they would contact the switchboard instead, thus taking up valuable time of the operators and prolonging the waiting time of actual customers before their calls were answered.

Many of the calls going through the switchboard originated from within the council as staff used it as a means of contacting colleagues. Contact details of the 900 staff could be found on the internal intranet system, but this was a time-consuming process and information was not always up-to-date. This resulted in staff resorting to calling the switchboard for the person they needed.

The IVR system, a speech-driven virtual-operator, was implemented to streamline and improve call handling. The system effectively removed non-customer calls from the customer-services telephone environment. The main switchboard was integrated with the Customer Service Centre to create one central point of contact for customers who had queries.

The IVR system was used to replace the automated touch-tone facility provided for councillors, staff, friends and family calling into the council. Since 'going live' with the IVR system, there have been significant changes in the service provided by the council. The council is now in a position to offer staff a faster, convenient and more efficient way of communicating with colleagues around the organisation. Instead of looking up each others' contact details on the intranet, staff can now simply dial '77' and give the name of the person or department they wish to speak to.

Previously only 3,000 calls per month passed through the automated touch-tone system: now 14,000 calls per month go through the IVR system. With 11,000 fewer calls each month going through to the Customer Contact Centre, it means that operators have more time to deal with real queries and customers have to spend less time waiting to have their calls answered. In addition, it has been possible to reduce the number of switchboard operators by 50%, leading to more cost savings for the council.

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