IBM

Belgian Directory Enquiry Service transformed by IBM WebSphere Voice Response

Belgacom Directory Assistance Centre

Overview

- **Application**
  Interactive Voice Response

- **Software**
  AIX* operating system
  WebSphere* Voice Response

- **Hardware**
  RS/6000*
  IAS customer server

- **Services**
  IBM Voice Systems specialists
  from the IBM La Gaude
  laboratory.

Belgian telecommunications leader uses interactive voice response technology to improve the productivity and motivation of its 600 directory enquiries agents.

Need for increased call centre productivity

As the nation's leader in global telecommunications, Belgacom SA is relied upon by a large section of Belgium's population and business community to provide local, intercity and international voice, data and cellular telephone services. On the directory enquiry side alone, the company's Directory Assistance Call Centre deals with 44 million calls each year from people requiring telephone numbers of subscribers.

"With such a huge volume of enquiries to handle, we were becoming increasingly concerned about how much time it was taking our call centre agents to give out numbers verbally," says Guido Vermeire, Belgacom's Call Centre Director. "What we needed was an automated method of relaying a number to a caller once the directory search had been completed, allowing the agent to move on quickly to the next caller."

> *"Call completion is the real 'killer' application for the service as nearly 60 per cent of callers now choose this option from the IVR menu, and this generates considerable additional traffic on our network."*
>
> *- Guido Vermeire, Call Centre Director, Belgacom SA*

Fortunate timing meant that Belgacom did not have long to wait for an answer to this problem as IBM's Voice Systems specialists at its La Gaude laboratory had recently completed the development of an Interactive Voice Response (IVR) application specifically designed for use in directory enquiry call centre environments.

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Interactive voice system

The new IVR application was a development of IBM's IBM WebSphere Voice Response voice processing platform and provides a capability to satisfy Belgacom's two principal requirements - automatic number announcement and call completion.

The Belgacom Directory Assistance Centre aims to respond to every customer call within two seconds and provide the information requested in under 35 seconds. Once a customer has dialled 1405, spoken to the call centre agent, and given the name and location of the subscriber, the agent informs the caller that the number has been found. A recorded voice then reads out the number to the caller.

The message also offers the caller a menu of numbered options, one of which is call completion which enables the caller to be connected automatically to the person whose number has just been given by Directory Assistance.

"The introduction of the IBM WebSphere Voice Response solution enables us to offer the caller a replay of the message within the IVR application, which gives us the opportunity to generate additional revenues," says Guido Vermeire. "But call completion is the real 'killer' application for the service as nearly 60 per cent of callers now choose this option from the IVR menu, and this generates considerable additional traffic on our network," he adds.

Turning cost into profit

With some 300 agent workstations in action at any one time, Belgacom's call centre works a three-shift system to provide a 24/7 service. This means that around 600 agents use the system daily, handling some 41 million domestic enquiries and three million international enquiries each year. Since the implementation of the new system, customers now spend, on average, around 28 seconds of each call in direct conversation with the agents and around seven seconds connected to the IVR platform, which represents an estimated saving of about 25 per cent of the centre's total agent time. As the result of installing IBM WebSphere Voice Response, the company estimates that 14 man-years of effort is saved annually by the new system.

The introduction of the IBM WebSphere Voice Response solution also means that Belgacom's call centre has been transformed from a cost centre into a profit centre. On top of the 150,000 calls which the agents are able to handle on an average business day, one million seconds per day (around 278 man hours) are now freed up to enable call centre agents to perform other tasks.

For Belgacom, the result is a more productive call centre, increased customer satisfaction and higher revenues. For the call centre agents, it means a more varied workload and greater job satisfaction. As to the future, Belgacom is aware that

its Directory Assistance solution is just one of the many uses to which the flexible IBM WebSphere Voice Response software architecture can be applied to provide value added services. Indeed, the company is already contemplating its use as the platform for its voice portal, since the solution can be used for multiple applications. Belgacom also says that it will shortly introduce IBM WebSphere Voice Response into its Yellow Pages directory service.

About Belgacom

Belgacom SA is the leading supplier of global telecommunications solutions in Belgium. The company is owned by the Belgian state and ADSB Telecommunications, an international consortium made up of SBC, Singapore Telecom, Tele Danmark and a group of investors from the financial sector. For more information on Belgacom visit the Web site: www.belgacom.com.

To learn more

For more information about IBM voice solutions visit our Web site: **ibm.com**/software/voice.