



## **CATALOG BASED RETAILING VIA AUTOMATED SPEECH TELEPHONE**

**To Whom Addressed:** Retail firms can increase sales dramatically by applying automated speech by telephone customer service to search catalogs, take orders, accept payments, etc, same as service by Internet. It also offers augmenting automated self-service with live staff advice. The objective of the service is to expand offering products and generally improve customer satisfaction, and thereby attain customer acquisition and retention. It enables low cost serving of customers who feel it is more convenient, opportune or natural to use speech via telephone as alternative, or in addition, to Internet terminals.

**Need:** Surveys show that Retail customers clamor for telephone contact with live staff knowledgeable in retail offerings. Customers typically have a vague notion of their need and require conversational interactions to find what they need and is available. Such services have proven costly and difficult, with customers experiencing long waits and inadequate service. These difficulties have even led some firms, for example Amazon, Overstock and Priceline, not to provide telephone customer service at all and rely on only web self-service. Interactive speech technology can do the same as the Internet. Quality has advanced greatly: no menus, say anything and improved speech recognition. WebForPhone provides service as follows:

- (a) Self-service by speech via inbound telephone calls, no wait, 24/7, same as by web, assisting callers in ordering retail items, even from a large catalog. The catalog search is intelligent. It captures caller speech of partial names and categories and provides illustrative examples.
- (b) If (a) does not completely satisfy caller, inbound phone calls are routed to expert staff, scheduling calls, or call-backs.
- (c) Reaching out to customers by outbound phone calls for reordering based on previous shopping.

**The Low-Cost Add-on Speech Channel:** Retail firms have in place website systems and processes for their business, including listings of products. These can be interfaced with the outsourced in-place WebForPhone Platform to add a voice telephone channel equivalent to the website channel. WebForPhone provides the conversational interactive search of catalog or classified directory.

An important feature of WebForPhone is its ease in interfacing with existing website systems for communications by voice via telephone. The WebForPhone Platform is essentially an intelligent translator between customer communicating by telephone speech and the terminal-like communicating with the Retail firm's website server. This requires no changes in the firm's system and processes. WebForPhone translates customer utterances on the phone into characters entered on a website with EXACTLY the same results. Different channel, exactly the same behavior. This allows rapid installation, reduces testing and eliminates changes to the business environment.



Another capability of the WebForPhone Platform is to connect, call-back, or schedule voice telephone calls between customer and Retail Advisers. It integrates using self-service by telephone voice with live discussions with a Retail Adviser. The line for live advising of customers is reduced by performing automatically the introductory and concluding phases of advising. For example, approaching by phone and informing a customer can be automatic. Once the customer and Retail Adviser are connected, the discussion and negotiation require live contact, while referring to the self-service data. The final closing can be performed automatically.

The service can also monitor the customer purchasing history and alerts the customer by outbound email, fax or telephone call of new purchasing opportunities.

Note that state-of-the-art of speech recognition has advanced greatly. Speech recognition can now recognize a very large vocabulary. It **does away with unappealing menus or pressing keys. The customer can “say anything” of what it wants.** Customers can browse through catalogs or directories interactively, searching for their needs. Pictures of items can be shown on cell phone screens.

**Customization:** The WebForPhone Platform translates between a customer voice and website functions. The automated generation of interfacing enables rapid installation. A short customization period is assumed. The customization provides:

- (a) Access by voice phone to Retailer’s website, to information on catalog of items, purchasing history and to accept orders
- (b) Fulfillment of requests for documents by email, fax or mail
- (c) Outbound calling customer to review needs
- (d) Transferring, scheduling or call-back to connect Retail Adviser and customer

**Cost:** These are ball park estimates for the following:

Customization: It is estimated at a total of \$10,000. WebForPhone offerings are on Try-Before-Buy basis. There is no risk to the Retail firm.

Usage costs: These are based on call-minutes/month usage of service. They range from 20 cents/call-minute for very low traffic to 5 cent/minute for 5 million call-minutes/month.

**Value Delivered:**

- (a) Verifying that catalog searches work, costs are reduced, customer satisfaction improved and revenues increased.
- (b) An operational scalable capability to support increasing revenues.
- (c) A basis for build up of service by Retail firm resulting from better customer satisfaction.