

# VOICE (UI) USER INTERFACE DESIGN:

## 5 SOLUTIONS THAT KEEP CUSTOMERS HAPPY

- ☑ YOUR PRODUCTS AND SERVICES ARE TOP-NOTCH.
- ☑ YOUR CUSTOMER SERVICE TEAM CAN'T BE BEAT.
- ☐ BUT YOUR CUSTOMERS DON'T SEE IT THAT WAY.



### Customers Don't Like To Wait

There's a long history of research that shows our strong aversion to waiting, whether it's in lines, in offices, online, or on the phone. We dislike waiting so much that we generally think that wait times are 35% longer than they actually were.<sup>1</sup> And even if the service is top-notch, we will remember our experience as poor if we think we waited too long.

Traditionally, designers and developers address customer dissatisfaction with wait times by reducing the time customers spend interacting with their technology. For example, in website performance, we've seen customer expectations for speed increase significantly to the point of instantaneous response times. One survey found that the number one reason for shoppers abandoning their online shopping carts was slow load times.<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, a key element of IVR Voice User Interface (VUI) design correlates the time callers spend in the IVR with their satisfaction of the experience. This approach strives to improve caller satisfaction by eliminating questions, using as few words as possible, and keeping prompts short.

### Wait Times: Perceived vs. Actual

The problem with this theory is it may not be providing an outstanding customer experience. In fact, the actual time callers spend resolving an issue is less important than their perception of whether they are making progress. Social and scientific studies provide further evidence that reducing wait times doesn't necessarily result in higher customer satisfaction, but that *perception* of less wait time does.

#### AIRPORT STUDY

##### How to Reduce Wait Time Complaints at Baggage Claim

*An airport in Houston had a problem with large numbers of customer complaints about long baggage wait times. To solve the problem, the airport hired more baggage handlers and customer service agents. They were able to reduce the length of the baggage wait time, but the customer complaints did not decline. A new approach to solving the complaints had the airport reschedule planes to gates furthest away from the baggage carousel. Instead of passively waiting for bags, passengers spent most of their time walking to the baggage claim, and thereby perceived the wait to be shorter. The airport had reduced complaints due to the perception of shorter wait times.<sup>3</sup>*

#### HOTEL STUDY

##### How to Reduce Perceived Elevator Wait Time

*Many years ago, a New York hotel had many customer complaints about the long wait times at the elevators. Since it wasn't possible to add more elevators or to speed up the existing elevators, the hotel had to come up with a way*

to improve customer satisfaction. They added mirrors near the elevators and the complaints stopped. The mirrors gave people something to do, such as checking their appearance or adjusting clothing, while they waited.<sup>4</sup>

While brevity should be a factor in VUI design, our experience is that the actual time callers spend resolving an issue is less important than their perception of whether they are making progress. Studies show that we prefer a longer experience if it ends better.

### CASE STUDY

#### More Pain Preferred to Less When the Ending is More Favorable

In 1993, researchers performed studies in which participants were exposed to two cold temperature experiences. In one trial, the participants spent 60 seconds in cold water. In the second trial, participants again spent 60 seconds in the cold water, but were exposed to warm water immediately after the 60 seconds. While the participants all reported the second experience was longer, most of them preferred it to the cold-only experience.<sup>5</sup>

## Strategies in VU Design that Improve Customer Perception

We can transfer the knowledge from these studies to our application of VU design to create experiences that customers perceive as shorter and more enjoyable. We recommend five strategies:

### 1. Use Technology To Reduce Actual Time

Voice platforms provide ways to reduce the overall length of calls. For example, optimizing all back-end queries and calls to the platform to ensure that data is retrieved and new pages are loaded quickly. There are other strategies, though, that can reduce a caller's actual wait times. For example, we can accelerate the call flow by:

#### Performing Tasks In Parallel—

Tasks that often occur sequentially can be done at the same time. Modern IVR platforms allow for asynchronous back-end interactions in which a query happens in parallel with another activity.

### CASE STUDY

A financial services client wanted to ensure that callers were immediately transferred to live agents if the IVR's back-end services that support self-service were not functioning. In this case, PTP recommended simultaneously playing the initial greeting (heard by every caller) and the back-end query even though this query adds a second or two to every call. The recording of the greeting is longer than the average response time of the back-end query, therefore callers do not experience any delays while waiting for the query to complete.

#### Personalizing with available information—

Technology enables designers to personalize a customer's experience using known information about the customer. While personalization is widely used to improve the customer experience, it also can be used to shorten the experience as demonstrated in the following example:

### CASE STUDY

A client asked PTP to help improve the customer experience of their technical support line. This included personalizing each customer contact with the IVR and improving the correct capture of product serial numbers.



**PTP helped create a database linked to the IVR that contains customers and the products they own. The IVR asks callers to select the product they are calling about from a list of their owned products.**

This approach uses known information about the customer to personalize and shorten the call, as well as increase the rate of serial number capture. Selecting the product from a menu enables the system to determine the best agent and warranty status of the product. As a result, the customer skips one of the more challenging questions in the product support call flow, which is to locate and identify the product's serial number.

Similarly, the IVR can make educated guesses about the reason a customer is calling by reviewing the customer’s contact history. For example, the IVR can ask callers whether they are calling about an open claim, and upon confirmation, can automatically provide the appropriate claim number. In addition to shortening the actual experience, personalization of this type can also improve the experience for callers, even when it lengthens the experience as described in the following example:

### CASE STUDY

*A pizza restaurant needed to improve the customer experience for phoned-in orders. Typically, the IVR has to collect a variety of details about the pizza order, such as size, type of crust, and types of toppings. PTP enhanced the IVR to offer customers the same pizza configuration they ordered previously. This change to the IVR increased the number of automated IVR orders, even when callers declined the previous order.*

### Strategically setting recognition functions—

We can reduce the length of IVR experiences by adjusting the use of recognition functions, such as timeouts and context options. For example, when providing language options, often the IVR asks callers to press a number to select a language other than English (e.g., “For Spanish, please press 9”). In the meantime, English speakers must wait for the system to realize there will be no number pressed (a recognition timeout) to proceed. Instead, we recommend a design in which the language selection prompt is collected in a subsequent menu. This prevents a caller from waiting for a recognition timeout.

## 2. Merge the Models: Aligning the Caller’s Mental Model and the Conceptual Model

Sometimes, the way we communicate with callers in the IVR doesn’t match our real-life communication styles. When we tell someone our address, we typically start with the thestreet address. But, speech science dictates that we first collect the city and state, or the zip code. We find that simply explaining why you’re asking for the information helps reduce caller frustration. Such as, “Now we’ll update the address where we will mail your final bill, starting with your zip code...”

Technical support is an area where customers often have a different understanding of how things operate. Often, customers think anyone

who answers the technical support line can assist them with their issue. In reality, technical support centers are large organizations of dispersed expertise and knowledge, with segmentation by product or service type.

Explaining this to callers can help reduce frustration when they are asked to provide answers to questions before being connected with a live agent, as in this IVR message: “To get you to the technician who specializes in your issue, I’m going to ask you a few questions. First...”

## 3. Be Strategic with Messaging

You can prioritize your messages to provide the most relevant information to customers at the time they need it.

### CASE STUDY

*A state lottery IVR greeted their callers and immediately told them how to access information on their website. This was then followed by options in the menu tree. While the website details didn’t add a lot of additional time to the call, they did confuse and frustrate callers who couldn’t immediately progress to the information they needed. By moving the main menu tree up, callers were able to quickly obtain the information they needed. Now, the website information plays after the caller selects from the main menu.*



Another example of sequencing your messaging to better serve your customers is where you play the, “**This call may be recorded**” message. Often, IVRs greet a caller and then immediately tell them the call may be recorded. Instead, to let the customer feel like they are progressing through the call, you could greet the customer and ask them to hold while you transfer them.

While they are waiting to be transferred, you can fill their “**hold time**” with the message that the call may be recorded. In this way, the caller does not feel as if they are waiting unnecessarily.

In a third example of sequencing your messages to better serve the callers, banks often ask their customers to wait while processing transactions, such as funds transfers, and once the transaction is complete, provide customers with details about the availability of the funds.

Instead, the messaging could play the availability of funds information while the customer waits for the transaction to complete, shortening the length of the call and occupying the customer with pertinent information while they wait.

#### 4. Demonstrate Progress with Conversational Markers

One way to make callers feel they are making progress during their IVR call is to use conversational “markers” to describe where the caller is in the process, and to give the reason for the process.

**For example**, a technical support application might collect a serial number of a product by saying, “Now I’d like to get the serial number from your product. This will just take a few steps, and it will let me look up its details so the technician can be ready to help you.”

**In another example**, the system alerts the caller about a request for more information: “I got your city and state from your ZIP code. Next, tell me just the street name...” And then, tells the caller why they are waiting: “Please hold while I look that up.” Using conversational markers can also make the messages clearer to callers as in the following banking transaction:

##### Transferring Funds — Without Markers

**“From which account would you like to transfer funds?”** [Caller responds.]

**“Which account would you like to transfer funds to?”** [Caller responds.]

**“How much would you like to transfer?”** [Caller responds.]

##### Transferring Funds — With Markers

**“First, which account would you like to transfer from?”** [Caller responds.]

**“Next, which account would you like to transfer to?”** [Caller responds.]

**“Finally, how much do you want to transfer?”** [Caller responds.]

#### 5. Speak Clearly and Naturally

Callers respond more positively to conversational language. Even though the IVR is an automated system, the more you can actively coach the voice talent to speak clearly and naturally, the better the overall customer experience. Simply emphasizing the most relevant words can help callers better understand the messages. In the previous example of transferring funds, the voice talent should emphasize “from,” “to,” and “how much,” while deemphasizing “First,” “Next,” and “Finally.” This will help callers quickly understand the information being sought.

Simplifying the messaging and options also helps reduce complexity and confusion for callers. In the next example, we rephrase the messaging from seeking a detailed answer to a Yes/No response.

**Introductory Message:** “Based on your income, you may be eligible for a federal subsidy to cover part of your health care costs...”

**Before**—“To find out whether you qualify, please tell me the total annual income for your household...”

**After**—“Is the total annual income for your household more than \$62,000?”

#### Perception is Key to Customer Experience

Rather than eliminating words that might seem superfluous or reducing the overall time of messages, VU designers should focus on solutions that affect how the customer perceives the experience. Simple design changes, such as those mentioned here can go a long way in improving the customer experience.

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<sup>1</sup>Everts, Tammy. *The Psychology of Waiting (and 5 things you can do make online checkout feel faster)*, www.performancetoday.com, May 6, 2013.

<sup>2</sup>Everts, Tammy. *The Psychology of Waiting (and 5 things you can do make online checkout feel faster)*, www.performancetoday.com, May 6, 2013.

<sup>3</sup>Stone, Alex. “Why Waiting is Torture,” *The New York Times*, August 18, 2012.

<sup>4</sup>Stevenson, Seth. “What You Hate Most About Waiting in Line” www.slate.com. June 1, 2012

<sup>5</sup>Kaheneman, Daniel; Barbra Fredrickson, Charles Schreiber, and Donald Redelmeier, 1993. “When more pain is preferred to less: Adding a Better End” *Psychological Science*, 4.6.1993: 4-1:405.