

# Brief: Three Key Practices To Succeed With Speech Analytics

Use These Methods To Improve Vendor Selection, Drive Quicker ROI, And Organize For A Successful Program

by Ian Jacobs  
February 17, 2016

## Why Read This Brief

Instead of letting old recordings of customer service calls sit in a dusty vault, many enterprises have started to investigate speech analytics tools that promise to turn those recordings into operational insight gold. But crafting a speech analytics program that drives improved customer experiences and operational efficiency takes much planning and new, flexible organizational structures. This report provides three best practices to help application development and delivery (AD&D) pros find a vendor and turn speech analytics into a customer obsession tool.

## Key Takeaways

### **Bring Speech Analytics Proofs Of Concept (POCs) In House**

When AD&D pros ship call recordings off to vendors for POCs, they cannot observe how many staff work on the analysis, how much effort the analysis took, or how easy or complicated employees will find it to perform workaday functions. Running the POC yourself, and on your terms, provides the ammunition for a more informed vendor selection.

### **Use Analytics To Improve Quality Monitoring**

Most customer service calls are boring. On the whole, they do not contain examples of amazing service from agents or moments where agents really blow it. Instead of using a random sample containing a huge number of low-value calls for quality checks, use speech analytics to identify calls where agents add value to the business — or ones where they suck value out of the business. Then, focus your quality management program on those flagged calls.

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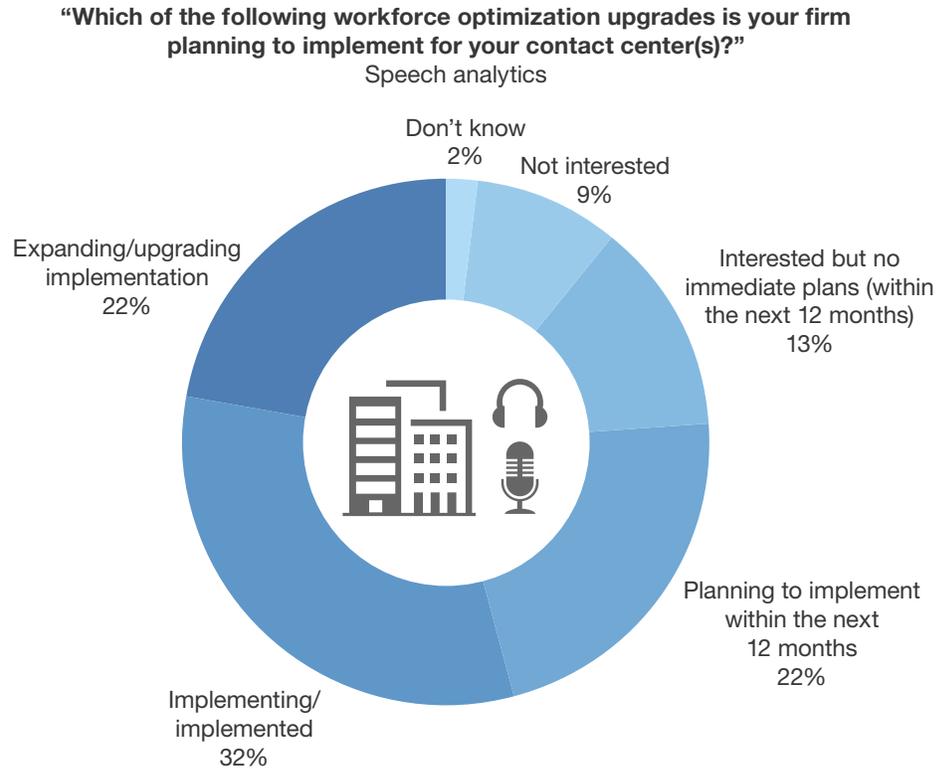
### Measure Thrice, Cut Once For Speech Analytics Success

As storage costs have plummeted, more enterprises have stopped selectively recording customer service calls to monitor quality and have begun to record every call. But instead of simply storing those recordings on a virtual dusty shelf, held only for compliance purposes, many AD&D pros have started to explore speech analytics tools to scrutinize those recordings. Enterprises hope to use this analysis to identify common and emerging customer problems, the highest- and lowest-performing agents, and opportunities for service process improvements. Only 9% of global telecommunications providers, for example, claimed they had no interest in implementing speech analytics (see Figure 1).

Given this interest, it's no surprise that Forrester clients regularly inquire about speech analytics best practices. Their questions center on how to identify the best provider, tackle problems that provide a fast ROI, and create organizational structures to ensure continuous improvement in speech analytics programs. The key to solving all of these problems? Intense advance planning. Even its staunchest proponents agree that speech analytics tools are complex.<sup>1</sup> To master that complexity, business technology (BT) teams in customer service should remember the — possibly apocryphal — saying attributed to Benjamin Franklin: “If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail.”

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**FIGURE 1** Interest In Speech Analytics Is Very High

Base: 776 global telecommunications technology decision-makers who are significantly involved in contact centers (20+ employees, 50+ seat contact center)

Source: Forrester's Global Business Technographics® Networks And Telecommunications Survey, 2015

**Key Practice 1: Tackle POCs With An Onsite Bake-Off**

Speech analytics deployments for contact centers of more than 1,000 seats can easily top \$1 million.<sup>2</sup> Because of the complexity of the technology, speech analytics requires enterprises to find a vendor that will act as a true partner in order to ensure success. For many AD&D teams, the process of winnowing out unsuitable candidates comes to a head in POC tests. These POCs can involve shipping off thousands of hours of recordings to the vendor, having it do the analysis on its hardware and in its environments, and then having it deliver its findings and the output of the analysis.

This model, however, masks critical information from AD&D pros making the purchasing decision. They cannot see what resources — both technological and human — the vendor required to create the analysis; nor can they see how easy or difficult the tools were to use. For this reason, AD&D teams should consider a new POC model: an onsite bake-off. Bring two or three vendors to the enterprise's

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facility, provide all vendors the same set of recordings, and monitor their work as they perform their analysis. This way, the purchasing team will have clear visibility into the blood, sweat, and tears required for the analysis and can match that effort to the quality of the output.

This model sounds simple, but to create such a POC, AD&D folks will need to overcome some complications. To make this POC approach work, understand and plan for challenges, including:

- › **Scheduling headaches.** Getting several vendors to agree to a schedule will likely prove difficult — and that is likely to be the easy part. That schedule also needs to work for internal networking, computing, and facilities resources as well as for the AD&D staff that will help facilitate the mechanics of the POC and monitor the work.
- › **Technical availability and readiness.** Each vendor will have its own requirements for server configurations and specifications; physical space demands, depending on the size of its onsite team; as well as network access. “Due to internal procurement processes and other IT processes, customers often find it difficult to scale their servers to the extent we need when time is an issue,” said Sukumar Ramaraj, head of product management, HP WFO Software.
- › **Hosting the vendors’ staff.** During onsite POCs, most enterprises assign specific staff to escort vendors around their facilities for security reasons, to arrange some meals, and to provide access to technical equipment. Ensuring that highly paid engineers don’t end up acting solely as corporate babysitters requires much forethought. Ensure an adequate pool of administrative staff to handle the escort duties, reserving AD&D teams for the technical hosting duties.
- › **Slower results.** As hinted at above, the added complexity of scheduling, limited access to facilities, and unfamiliar working environments mean that onsite POC bake-offs regularly take longer than traditional hosted or offsite POCs. Ironing out all of the details well ahead of time and having dedicated resources available onsite to troubleshoot problems as they arise can help streamline the process and minimize the delays.
- › **Vendors opting out completely.** Getting vendors to agree to participate often tops the list of the biggest challenges for AD&D teams. Some vendors, including CallMiner and HP, have engaged with customers in similar POC environments; they both say they are game to tackle such evaluations, as long as the customer recognizes and plans for the challenges listed here. Other customers, however, report that vendors balked at the demand for an onsite bake-off and essentially dropped out of consideration. That refusal to participate, however, might be emblematic of that vendor’s willingness to partner with its customers.

**Key Practice 2: Use An Analytics-Driven Quality Program To Prove ROI**

AD&D and customer service teams need to find quick wins that will show the ROI required to win continuing funding for speech analytics programs. An analytics-driven quality program remains one of the easiest ways to accrue easy-to-measure benefits quickly. Most companies use a random sample of call recordings for their quality management programs. Speech analytics allows AD&D pros to

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target specific calls, making it central to firms' business technology agenda focused on technologies designed to help win, serve, and retain customers.<sup>3</sup> It also makes the quality program much more effective and improves the efficiency of the quality evaluators.

Health services provider Optum records 64 million calls per year. It decided to create an analytics-driven quality program. The company now analyzes 100% of the calls on a specific topic so that it can target quality — and review it at a statistically significant level. “We were doing random sampling and were not getting much out of it; now we’re listening to the calls where agents have the opportunity to shine or to fail,” according to Tina Goodwin, senior director of consumer experience at Optum. A solid quality-driven analytics program starts by flagging calls for review where agents either add or remove value from the business. Examples of such calls are ones that contain:

- › **A marked change in customer emotions.** If a customer starts a call happy but ends upset, there are likely coachable moments for the agent in that call. When an agent talks a customer off the ledge, trainers likely can use that call to train other agents on best practices in customer-save behaviors. To identify such calls, AD&D pros need to create categories or topics in the speech analytics tools that specifically look for the delta in emotions.

- › **Complaints about agents late in a call.**

When a call gets close to wrapping up and the customer remains unhappy with the company or the agent, the agent probably did not deploy the proper set of skills. This marks a trainable moment.

- › **Excessive cross-talk.** When the agent and customer speak over each other, which is known as cross-talk, the agent has exposed a lack of empathy. This also marks a trainable moment.

- › **The standard repertoire of quality assurance evaluation categories.** Did the agent use the greeting script and thank the customer for the call? If the call was transferred, did the agent adapt his or her greeting accordingly? Did the agent ask apposite questions to best diagnose the customer's problem? Did the agent place the customer on hold several times? Did the agent refrain from using internal jargon? Identifying calls ahead of time where the agent either failed to perform easier tasks or succeeded in performing more complex tasks helps quality evaluators only tackle the calls that really drive the customer service experience.

“I have failed more than a few times before I worked out a [governance] model that actually works.” (Apa Gupta, Firstsource Solutions)

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**Key Practice 3: Explore A Hub-And-Spoke Model For Speech Analytics Governance**

On customer service calls, customers talk about everything from wonky website designs to poorly worded marketing offers to confusing bills to defective products. Subsequently, speech analytics often identifies problems well beyond the control of the customer service organization. Therefore, driving the greatest value from the technology requires creating a cross-organizational structure to manage speech analytics and its output.

Easier said than done. “I have failed more than a few times before I worked out a model that actually works,” said Apa Gupta, vice president of customer interaction analytics at Firstsource Solutions, an outsourcer that uses speech analytics internally for operational improvements and offers speech analytics services to its clients. Firstsource settled on a hub-and-spoke model. Speech analytics experts reside in the hub. Each time the company wants to use speech analytics to analyze a new process, it can push someone from the central hub out to the spoke, or the new team. One spoke could tackle the lead-to-revenue process, while another spoke could analyze marketing promotions.

This model requires AD&D and customer service teams to lead the charge to break down organizational silos, in some cases single-handedly — a daunting task when they have few enforcement mechanisms to drive change. Still, this challenge is outweighed by the following advantages:

- › **Faster time to action.** If companies stick to a centralized structure, team members often require lengthy ramp-up times to gain understanding of specific processes. Because the domain expertise about the specific processes resides in the spokes, the hub-and-spoke model speeds up time-to-proficiency and creates a faster time-to-action.
- › **Easier identification of resources required for cross-functional collaboration.** Scott Bakken, founder of speech analytics consultancy MainTrax, works with his clients to get all impacted parties in a conference room once a month. The AD&D pros have 50 recordings teed up and play them in this group setting. Bakken calls these pow-wows calibration meetings. Hearing the actual calls has much stronger resonance than reading a summary of the content in a report. The hub-and-spoke model makes creating an invite list for calibration meetings easier — invite the managers for all of the groups represented by spokes.

**Recommendations****Getting That Initial ROI Should Only Be Your Starting Point**

The three practices above tackle the vendor selection phase, the deployment phase, and the operational runtime phase of a speech analytics project. But beyond those three critical phases, you can adopt operational and organizational changes that will improve the customer obsession of your speech analytics program as well as complementary technologies that can provide additive value to

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your program going forward. Since speech analytics requires continuous tuning to keep its results relevant, you can roll out these changes and new technologies postdeployment and still derive much value from them. As a start, AD&D pros and their customer service business partners should:

- › **Focus on the champagne moments.** The natural inclination for customer service teams is to have their AD&D partners set speech analytics tools to identify the negative events that tarnish customers' experiences. But enterprises use these tools to judge agent performance; this makes agent buy-in critical. Agents need to trust the analysis the tools generate if they are to change their behavior based on that analysis. Using the tools to identify agents providing excellent experiences and using those experiences for coaching of other agents will help build the required agent trust.
- › **Fashion the analytics hub into a center of excellence.** In a hub-and-spoke model, the responsibilities of the spokes are usually easier to define since they are dedicated to a specific business process. To create a robust hub, you'll need a dedicated team that understands your market, your organization, and how external events impact both the market and the enterprise. Ideally, the hub staff can also quickly identify who within the organization can actually remedy issues identified by the speech analytics process. Once identified, these staff members often form the core of a new spoke.
- › **Consider adding desktop analytics to the mix.** Speech analytics focuses on the external — what customers think and say. Desktop analytics looks inward to what agents do. Combining the two provides a fuller picture of the overall customer experience and better arms you to drive process improvements and business outcomes. For example, when the speech analytics detects an agent telling a customer, "sorry, my system is slow today," the desktop tool lets you see if that agent has simply decided to check Facebook or if the delay in service occurred because the agent had to Alt-Tab between multiple applications to solve the customer's issue.

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## Supplemental Material

### Survey Methodology

For Forrester's Global Business Technographics® Networks And Telecommunications Survey, 2015, we conducted an online survey fielded in January 2015 of 3,627 business and technology decision-makers located in Australia, New Zealand, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, the UK, and the US from companies with two or more employees.

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**Companies Interviewed For This Brief**

CallMiner

Nexidia

Firstsource Solutions

NICE Systems

Genesys

Optum

HP (HP WFO Software)

Verint Systems

MainTrax

VPI

**Endnotes**

- <sup>1</sup> For more on the resource hurdles that AD&D teams face when deploying speech analytics, see the [“Brief: Real-Time Speech Analytics – Still More Sizzle Than Steak”](#) Forrester report.
- <sup>2</sup> For more on the usage scenarios for and cost to implement speech analytics, interaction analytics, and 23 other customer service technologies, see the [“TechRadar™ For AD&D Pros: Contact Center Solutions For Customer Service, Q1 2015”](#) Forrester report.
- <sup>3</sup> For more on the ways that customer-obsessed companies will transform technology management into a customer-facing function, see the [“The CIO Mandate: Engaging Customers With Business Technology”](#) Forrester report.

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