

SwedishAmerican Health System

Bolstering the Answering Service Through Speech Recognition

The Challenge

The telecommunications department at SwedishAmerican Health System serves both as the health system's switchboard and as a for-profit answering service for approximately 650 clients. Total call volume had grown to over 130,000 calls per month, approximately 60,000 of which were switchboard calls consisting mainly of requests to be connected to SwedishAmerican employees. Because of the increased volume, the level of service had declined. Calls were frequently backing up and hold times were lengthening, both for switchboard callers and for users of the answering service.

"We needed to find a way to improve our customer service by allowing the callers to gain access to the right individual or department in the least amount of time," says Dick Marsh, Director of Engineering, Biomedical and Telecommunications at SwedishAmerican. "If we couldn't improve our overall answering speed, we risked losing clients to competing answering services."



The Objectives

- Reduce hold times and improve the average answering speed
- Reach and maintain a high service level, allowing the answering service to grow its client base without hiring more staff
- Reduce the number of directory transfer requests handled by switchboard operators
- Increase the availability of operators to handle answering service calls from physicians and healthcare professionals
- Steer clear of IVR technology that might irritate or confuse callers
- Run on Cisco communications platform

The Solution

The telecommunications department determined that it could significantly reduce hold times by routing internal directory assistance calls through a speech-enabled line, which would bypass operators and free them to take calls for the answering service. Depending on the success of

Overview

SwedishAmerican Health System serves 12 counties in northern Illinois and southern Wisconsin through a 400-bed regional acute care facility and a network of more than 20 primary and multi-specialty clinics. By implementing speech recognition software from Amcom, the SwedishAmerican telecommunications department reduced caller hold times by more than 50-percent and dramatically improved its answering services to healthcare professionals.

Industry

Healthcare

Solution

Amcom™ Smart Speech™

Communications Platform

Cisco™

"Smart Speech has allowed us to provide a better level of service to our clients without increasing our staffing. At the rate we're going, this system will pay for itself in less than 12 months."

Dick Marsh

Director of Engineering, Biomedical and Telecommunications at SwedishAmerican

an employee-only speech line, SwedishAmerican would consider rolling out a similar line for external callers dialing into the main hospital number.

After deciding speech technology was the way to improve customer satisfaction, the telecommunications department sought a solution provider. They didn't have to look far.

"We've been using Amcom's computer technology and database software to run our answering service for 15 years," says Marsh. "When Amcom came out with Smart Speech™ and we saw the ease of use of this system and how it tied into the information we already had, it made sense to use their speech recognition software."

SwedishAmerican elected to use the Amcom speech system not only for directory call routing, but also for speech-enabled paging and meet-me paging.

The Immediate Impact

After installing the Amcom speech applications for internal users, SwedishAmerican saw immediate benefits: User acceptance was high and the volume of calls coming to operators began to decrease. The speech system was simple and easy to use; callers dialed the 4-digit extension, said the name of the employee they wanted to reach, and were immediately connected. Anyone who needed an operator could simply say "operator" or dial 0. The vast majority of users, it turned out, didn't need an operator and completed the speech-automated transfer.

Fast-Forward to Phase Two

The internal speech rollout was so effective that SwedishAmerican decided to fast-track to the phase two rollout: Bringing the speech directory line to the general public.

"We had vowed never to put an auto attendant on our main number," explains Marsh, "but this was different. We were getting calls by employees telling us how great it was, how much they liked it. It was as easy, if not easier, than calling into a switchboard operator." The results of installing Smart Speech on the hospital's main number were more dramatic than anyone at SwedishAmerican anticipated.

"The day our external speech line went on, the operators thought I had actually turned the phone system off!" says Marsh. "There was a noticeable decrease in switchboard call volume."

The Results

- The SwedishAmerican telecommunications department is now handling 30,000 of its 60,000 monthly switchboard calls through Smart Speech
- Average hold time has decreased by more than 50-percent, with call abandonment declining similarly
- Average answering speed at peak calling times is now 20 seconds, compared to 60 seconds before the Smart Speech installation
- Operators now have more time to devote to emergency calls and calls for the answering service

"Smart Speech has allowed us to provide a better level of service to our clients without increasing our staffing," adds Marsh. "We're ready to expand to new answering service clients while maintaining a higher quality of service. At the rate we're going, this system will pay for itself in less than 12 months."

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