

NIE CASE STUDY

Background

NIE Energy is a household name and major provider of electricity to Northern Ireland's homes and businesses, servicing some 758,000 customers. NIE Supply aims to provide value for money and the highest standards of customer service.

Historically most of the electricity in Northern Ireland has been supplied by NIE Energy. Over recent years the electricity market has undergone radical change which culminated in the market opening fully to include both domestic and non-domestic customers on 1st November 2007 in line with the creation of the Single Electricity Market (SEM) in Ireland.

In order to drive efficiencies and enhance customer service NIE Energy in conjunction with their outsourced contact centre provider, Northgate Information Systems, and SpeechStorm undertook a programme to utilise speech recognition to automate some services provided through their contact centres.

Challenge

In order to address the key challenges being faced as a result of the introduction of the Single Electricity Market, NIE Energy has undertaken a far-reaching programme to address a number of key issues including:

- Increase productivity. Pressures facing the sector with market opening meant that NIE Energy needed to control costs and increase productivity particularly in its contact centres
- Improve customer experience. Retaining customers is essential during difficult market conditions, and customer experience is seen as business critical for NIE Energy
- Demonstrate innovation and added value. Faced with new market conditions and the competitive environment NIE Energy need to lead with innovative and flexible services to their customer base on a 24x7 basis.

For many of NIE Energy's customers, the call centre is their primary contact with the company. NIE Energy required a call centre solution that not only allowed them to manage their costs but also continue to improve the quality of service that their customers received over the phone.

Solution Overview

Leveraging the SpeechStorm open standards hosting platform and speech recognition applications, NIE Energy increased the call handling capacity of the contact centre whilst freeing up agents to deal with more complex enquiries.

A number of key services were identified as candidates for automation using the SpeechStorm solution – these included Account Enquiries, Payments and Direct Debit set-up.



Industry - Utilities

Challenges

- Increase Productivity
- Improve Customer Experience
- Demonstrate Innovation

Solution

- Identification & Verification
- Account Balance

Results

- Improved Customer Service
- Reduced Costs
- Positive Brand Reinforcement

About Company

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Solution Overview Continued

Phase 1 of the programme commenced early 2007 and resulted in the following services being automated within the speech recognition application:

- Customer Identification & Verification (ID&V). Callers are pre-identified by the system using their alpha-numeric account number with in-built check digits.
- Account Balance & Summary. Callers are given their account summary details which included current balance and last payment details.

Utilising SpeechStorm's hosted platform ensured rapid deployment of the solution with minimal capital outlay by NIE Energy. The solution also provides NIE Energy with a powerful web based Management Information suite through SpeechStorm's assistDashboard. This enables NIE Energy staff to gain instant access to data such as call volumes processed per hour, average call duration, abandoned call rate etc. Subsequent phases will see the other priority services being automated and deployed throughout 2007 and 2008.

Benefits

As a result of the initial deployment NIE Energy have been able to realise a number of benefits, including:

- Improved Customer Service. Reduced queuing in the call centre and Customer Service Agents are freed up from routine calls to resolve more complex issues. The service is available on a 24x7 basis.
- Reduced Costs. Calls are handled without any live agent intervention resulting in significant cost reduction. Over 80% of all account enquiries are now managed by the automated service, which equates to some 50,000 calls since the service first went live just over a year ago.
- Positive Brand Reinforcement. NIE Supply is perceived as innovative, seeking to employ new technologies to improve service to customers and offering returns for shareholders.

Future

Thanks to the success of the introduction of this service, NIE Supply is looking at other areas within the business that will benefit from speech recognition. Currently SpeechStorm is working closely with Northgate and NIE Supply to develop a call routing solution which will route all calls that come into the business through a speech-enabled menu.



"The solution from SpeechStorm means we can offer a service which minimises call waiting times and enables our customer service agents to deal with more complex enquiries. We also expect to see an increase in the efficiency with which calls are handled. I was impressed with the quality of the system from the team and the no-fuss approach brought to the project"

Jim Clendinning, NIE
Supply Service
Development Manager