

SAP INFO

THE SAP MAGAZINE

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Sincerely,

Your SAP INFO Team

Voice recognition combined with SAP software

SAP Learns to Speak

Voice recognition software enables customers to provide their utility company with meter readings over the telephone at three o'clock in the morning. Moreover, if the software is integrated with an SAP system, the data is entered automatically in the system and the transaction is closed.

Customer relationship management (CRM) technology offers a wide variety of scenarios for IT-supported customer contact, although most of them involve an employee sitting at a computer and entering data into the system manually. There are alternatives, however. "Faster, more cost-effective options are available today," says Christian Sauter, CEO of Excelsis Business Technology AG, headquartered in Stuttgart, Germany. "An automated voice channel can now be seamlessly integrated into the IT landscape."

Voice computers are emerging as an alternative to personal contact and call centers. There are still segments of the population who do not use PCs, such as older, less technology-inclined people. But every household has a telephone. "No other medium enables you to reach such a broad range of customers," says Sauter. The automated information and transactional processes available over the telephone range from simple service requests to complex business transactions.

Understanding the caller

The modern voice front end – direct voice-operated use of a software application – is considerably different from traditional customer service: At call centers, callers find themselves put endlessly on hold. Computers that callers operate by pressing certain buttons on their telephone can try callers' patience, too. Callers may only remember some of the options or cannot find a suitable one.

Sauter: "Voice dialog systems are only well received if they guide callers through the dialog in a way that reassures customers they have been understood." That is why linguists

and psychologists are involved in solution design at Excelsis. A pleasant voice and specific questions help callers consider the call constructive and aimed at achieving results. Moreover, a voice application considerably increases customer service because it enables callers to contact companies at any time of day or night.

In cooperation with Vattenfall Europe Information Services, Excelsis developed a voice solution for Berlin-based utility company Vattenfall Europe AG that records electricity meter readings completely automatically. The system is fully integrated with the SAP for Utilities solution portfolio, enabling the information to be immediately processed in the back-end system and the transaction closed. As a result, process costs are lower, and errors in manual data entry are eliminated.

Voice-triggered SAP processes

VoiceXML, an XML dialect, converts spoken information of any kind into data that SAP systems can use. "Whether in mySAP CRM, mySAP ERP, or any of the industry solution

portfolios, our technology enables processes to be triggered by voice and the SAP software to run them without integration gaps," says Sauter. The technology can operate regardless of whether a customer or a system makes the call. Both incoming and outgoing call-center processes are automated, which results in an up to 90 percent cheaper cost structure.

Looking for further uses, Excelsis identified a strong demand for automated voice applications in the healthcare industry and developed a new business model for the industry. "The general wish is for the elderly and chronically sick to remain in their own homes as long as possible. However, checking up on, and caring for these people is a burden on healthcare providers," says Sauter. But a voice computer could ask Mr. Miller about his health, or Ms. Smith could receive a telephone call reminding her to take her medicine. Sauter says, "In particular, widespread diseases such as diabetes, high blood pressure, heart failure, and asthma offer significant potential for reducing costs in the healthcare industry."

Dr. Astrid Schau, journalist in Sindelfingen, Germany

■ EXCELSIS BUSINESS TECHNOLOGY

Excelsis Business Technology AG, a leading provider of speech portals and voice solutions, employs 100 people. Companies in the television, radio, and other media, finance, telecommunications, healthcare, transport and traffic, retail, and utility industries, as well as organizations in the public sector, use Excelsis solutions. The Excelsis product portfolio includes software used as a development platform for voice portals based on the worldwide VoiceXML standard. The software can be combined with all current SAP applications as a voice front end. Moreover, customers can have Excelsis solutions operated for them on a hosting platform so that they do not need to invest in their own infrastructure for voice solutions.

Diabetes: Voice Applications in Practice

According to the German Ministry of Health, six million people in Germany suffer from diabetes and regularly take insulin. If a diabetic with generally frail health lives alone, a voice application can reduce the risk of going into potentially fatal shock. The Excelsis application calls the diabetic patient to ask for blood sugar levels. If these differ from the key data stored in the SAP back-end system, or if the patient reacts in a disoriented manner or does not answer the call, the application alerts a relative, carer, or the emergency services. If the telephone call is without incident, the application reminds the patient about taking insulin and automatically passes on the new blood sugar data to the patient information system of the doctor responsible.