



Kcom implements a hosted cloud-based voice automation service

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The Customer

NHS Business Services Authority (NHSBSA) is the special health authority of the National Health Service. It provides a wide range of services across the entire NHS, both to support NHS professionals and directly to the public, including NHS pensions, the NHS dental service and the prescription pricing service. The latter includes the reimbursement of approximately 65 million prescription items per month to 10,000 pharmacies in the UK. NHSBSA also administers the European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) scheme.



The Challenge

NHSBSA needed a solution that achieved the following benefits:

- Ability to handle a high volume of calls
- Extend the hours for customer contact to go beyond our contact centre's opening hours
- Significant cost savings
- A swifter and more effective customer experience

The NHSBSA call centre deals with a number of different types of call, relating to the different services it provides. Each call type comes with its own unique challenges. While most companies have a set customer base about which much information is known, NHSBSA's customer base is the whole of the UK population. Therefore, it is consistently having to forecast calls from potentially over 60 million people, making it difficult to allocate resources all the time.

EHIC cards need to be reviewed every five years, so NHSBSA's contact centre was receiving a constantly high volume of calls from customers needing new cards - on average, 300,000 per month. In some months as many as 2 million calls are received. The contact centre was previously unable to deal effectively with such unpredictable spikes in call volume. The majority of calls being handled by agents were the more routine and straightforward application requests, so that agents had less time to respond to more complex and detailed customer calls.

Voice Automation

Kcom implemented a hosted cloud-based voice automation service once it was ruled that a touch-tone system wouldn't be ideal in this situation. Rather than traditional customer service agents dealing with the calls, virtualised call centre agents can now handle them, meaning that there is no limit to the number of calls which can be taken. The only restriction is bandwidth and infrastructure; Kcom provides the infrastructure which underpins the solution which creates the flexibility to scale up or down as and when needed.

NHSBSA wanted to work with a partner on a 'risk and reward' basis. Kcom proposed an innovative model where every call handled successfully (i.e. which culminated in an EHIC card being sent to the caller) would be linked to a fee – Kcom is only paid for each successful transaction. This ensures that NHSBSA would never have to pay for unsuccessful transactions, reinforcing Kcom's belief in the effectiveness of the system that has been deployed.

Brendan Brown, Head of Operational and Shared Services at NHSBSA commented:

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Before the voice automation service was implemented, call centre staff were predominantly dealing with EHIC calls rather than other services. Now, the new system has taken a large amount of routine calls away

"The voice automation system that Kcom deployed has been revolutionary within our business. Not only has it created huge cost savings, but it has also improved the overall experience for our customers. Since its inception the system has been highly efficient and we are impressed with the risk-reward system Kcom has implemented. To make the required changes to the technology meant we needed to trust the supplier and Kcom has proven at every step that it is worthy of that trust."



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from the staff and freed them up to deal with more complex customer enquiries. They also have more time to spend on training and the building up of skills. At present, around 4,000 calls a day on average are answered and dealt with by the voice automation rather than by customer service agents.

The cloud-based voice recognition solution is already delivering huge cost savings for the NHSBSA. EHIC card requests and renewals are now automated through the voice recognition system, making a potential 70% saving if the transaction is fully completed. The NHSBSA has so far made a saving of £700,000 since the system was implemented in 2009. And this figure continues to grow.

Improved Customer Service

The voice automation system enables a smoother customer experience with a reduction in waiting time for the caller. The process is more attuned to real human users, and customers rarely finding it necessary to chase up the status of their card. Callers can even renew EHIC cards on behalf of family members. The automated virtual agents were designed with human factors in mind, providing a reassuring experience for the customers, who have reacted very positively to the process.

Kcom integrated the voice automation system into NHSBSA's customer database and if the process fails midway through, information is still collected from the customer and passed on to agents. This ensures callers don't have to give all of their details again to an agent to complete the transaction. This all adds to the overall customer experience, making application for an EHIC card effortless.

"It was very important for us to be able to work closely with a supplier who would continue to monitor and make improvements to the system, even after deployment" added Brendan Brown. "We were delighted with the system from day one, and yet we have benefitted from further refinements ever since. We are confident that the system will continue to improve efficiency. This has come about through a genuine sense of mutual trust between Kcom and ourselves, and this has led to us considering new projects with them for the future."



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