



Text as a mainstream channel

If you've only seen text used as a competition mechanism, then welcome to the world of text as a mainstream communication channel. Many organisations receive thousands of texts every month from people using this medium to interact, instead of a call, fax or email. Fly Buys members can seek their points balance and redeem selected rewards, pizzas can be ordered and delivery arrangements made entirely by text, and you can request enrolment forms for the election by text. IT managers should familiarise themselves with this channel to proactively take a business improvement to their management colleagues, if this hasn't already been requested.

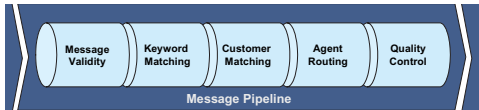
Texting has become a mainstream business channel for good reason – the high penetration of mobile phones. Texts are inexpensive in comparison to voice, there is no on-hold time and the sender controls the interaction to request the information they need. As an outbound channel an organisation can have confidence that they will get to the person intended if they have the correct mobile number. Non-delivery receipts are a feature of text, identifying numbers that are incomplete or terminated so that database updating can be initiated from this cost effective mechanism.

IT architecture design

To install a text application, organisations have the choice of thin client or thick client architectures, and whether to purchase an off-the-shelf text application or to have a proprietary system built. Most organisations that have installed text applications

have chosen the thin client option, according to two vendors spoken to. The thin client architecture is extremely simple to arrange, and provides a high level of reliability relative to the process of developing a thick client architecture sufficient to meet reliability and security standards. A university contact centre manager we spoke with was very pleased that their thin client solution had been so easy to initiate, saying that it had only involved agreeing to pay a monthly fee for connection to the vendor's application and agreement on the keyword, to start the service for students.

Whilst it is easy to sign up to a vendor application, IT managers will want to check out the reliability of the solution, and should find this relatively simple to do. As it will become one of the indispensable channels of the organisation, you have to know that the solution is highly reliable. A thin client application is likely to be hosted at an independent datacentre, with full redundancy, managed 24/7 by the host. You should expect that the servers will be monitored continuously with uptimes that achieve industry standards, e.g. 99.5+ per cent, and that architecture includes secure firewall systems for client security. The vendor's relationship with the telcos is very important, as the interconnection with the mobile network is the means of passing messages from the sender through the application to the contact centre. Client organisations that prefer a thick client solution will have to arrange and monitor the interconnection with the telcos which would be more of a commitment than many smaller clients can meet.



Source: Datasquirt

Text applications can be fully integrated to a client database so that the CRM integration many organisations now require is available. Client data can be downloaded regularly to an independent database in a batched process, maintaining independence from the core client application. For organisations that have installed multimedia queuing applications in the contact centre, text can sit behind these and will become yet another medium or interaction queued alongside voice, email, fax etc. For example Datasquirt's CONTACT product accommodates fax and email messages as well as text treating all three as a single multimedia channel if required. In the diagram, the message pipeline shows the five steps of integration with the customer database records (Customer Matching).

Contact Centre benefits

For the contact centre manager there are many advantages from embracing the text channel. If your centre allows mobile callers to use your freecall lines there are obvious benefits because you will reduce carrier charges through fewer mobile callers waiting on-hold at your expense. Of equal importance, shifting voice callers to the text

channel will increase the time your centre has to respond as texters are not as sensitive to response times as voice callers. You will be able to move the need to respond to these interactions, by about one hour – the industry standard for an acceptable response time for text (vs 20 seconds for voice and four hours for email).

Text applications can provide similar functions to an IVR application, presenting callers with a menu, and after a choice is confirmed the text can be routed to an appropriate skills-based team. At this point, an automated message confirming that the text has been received can be sent so that the user is aware of when, and through which medium, they will be contacted.



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