Contexta360™

SPEECH INTELLIGENCE

GUIDE

What to look for in your evaluation of speech analytics and conversational computing

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Whether you work in commerce or in some form of public service, your organization and its staff are dealing with the internal and external pressures of:

More, better, faster, for less

Why is this? Well, whether we like it or not, the world we live in is getting more competitive, connected, demanding and savvy and there are more options available for businesses and consumers to choose from. In addition, the channels to access, buy and serve are radically changing. Ultimately, however, nothing has changed. People and businesses still want to ASK, BUY, COMPLAIN, REQUEST, or SERVE. In parallel, there are also still customers or businesses that are wealthy and those that are not, those that will grow and prosper and those that will not. Customers still expect good service, much as they did many years ago. The fundamental dynamics of life and business have not changed that much over the past 200 years.

Winning, keeping, delighting and serving customers a century ago revolved around having good / differentiated products or services, deploying good customer satisfaction methods, and knowing your market. But the refresh cycles were measured in months and years, information was sparse, and the competition few.

Fast forward to today:

- Competition is high
- Decision cycles are in real time
- Refresh cycles occur daily
- Data available is MASSIVE
- Customers are fickle and have high expectations
- Customers can move their business elsewhere with ease.

And here we enter the realm of speech analytics and the rationale behind it

Even though we have witnessed an incredible digitization of customer interaction over the past three to five years, this has predominantly been centred on self-service, apps, IVR, web, kiosks and the like. These are all good in many regards, and have really transformed the cost structures, service strategies, sales channels, information access and the CX frameworks of many organizations. However, today 60 per cent of our customer interaction is still via phone, video or real-time voice communication platforms.

This is understandable. When it matters, nothing beats human-to-human interaction. This is amplified when it is an important customer, a strategic or valuable product or service, a potential escalation and many other scenarios. These are key CX moments, C$ moments or C-Sat moments. Many of the top analyst forums predict a resurgence of the importance of the human-to-human call.

But, the task that the agent has now is significant as the world they operate in is fast, awash with a sea of data (internal and external) and filled with high CX expectations. Decisions are made quickly. Windows of service or sale are short, so the time to impress is tight. Security and compliance add further hurdles, and the poor human needs assistance.

Furthermore, the task the company leadership or customer management leadership has is equally as vast as in many cases they only capture a very small percentage of the context of the call. It may be recorded. It may even be transcribed or sample surveys done but, in the vast majority of cases, most organizations who believe they are digital are in fact only about 50 per cent digital. The web forms, IVR, chatbots, apps and self-service portals give prodigious meta data on what customers and prospects are doing. Its digital. However, the voice traffic offers precious little insight into what is being communicated, how and what the opportunity is, or what the eminent threat, risk or context is about.

Enter speech analytics

The agent's world – At the moment of the call

The diagram paints a rather bleak and negative picture of some of the conditions and characteristics of a formal or informal contact centre environment. Of course, there are some agents for whom this is not the case. Instead of being bored after the fiftieth call about the same concern, the agent is still motivated. And there are agents who follow a high SOP (standard operating process) who diligently listen, answer and enter all the data into all the forms and fields in the agent interface so that the sales, product, marketing and executive management team has a crystal-clear view of everything that is happening. These agents may also take additional notes to describe the customer's sentiment, and of, course, they read the 27Mb file of the customer's history so that they have a full 360-degree view before they propose answers.

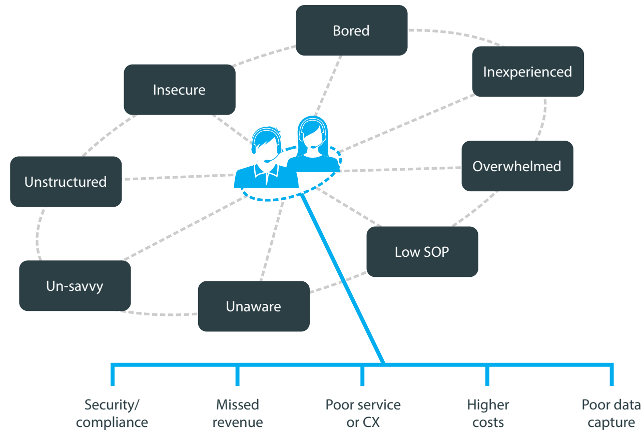
But, in our experience, these super-humans are few and far between. Even if intentions and culture are good, the task is crazy big.

Product marketeers (in their wisdom) change packages and pricing. Competition changes. Returns policies change. Even legislation and compliance regulations change.

The agents' world is tough in four key areas:

1. Customers (nearly always) have to talk to the computer in your HQ or cloud to get anything done. They either do this with a 100 per cent digital interaction; i.e. via an app, web form, IVR etc, or they talk to an agent who acts as a proxy to the computer or cloud (they are the data enter system). This is the first stress point as the agent has to fully understand the needs of the customer and then enter this diligently and completely into the system of record or the CRM / ERP application every time. And they need to get it right every time.
2. The agent may not be fully trained.
3. The agent may not have access (or easily digested access) to prior interactions or have the ability to come up with solutions or an offer based on that data (both internal and external) in an instant.
4. The compliancy loops and process hurdles that revolve around identity, GDPR, Mifid2, PCI, ISO, and so on mean we could be taking away brain power from the agent to focus on these needs.

The agent at the moment of the call needs help. A lot of help. They need assistance with identity, compliance, best practices and suggested actions. They need an alert to prompt them about other interactions or market data that may be relevant to this particular call. Their brain is already working hard to deal with listening to the caller, understanding the caller one to one, let alone dynamically thinking about all the products or service SKUs or processes.

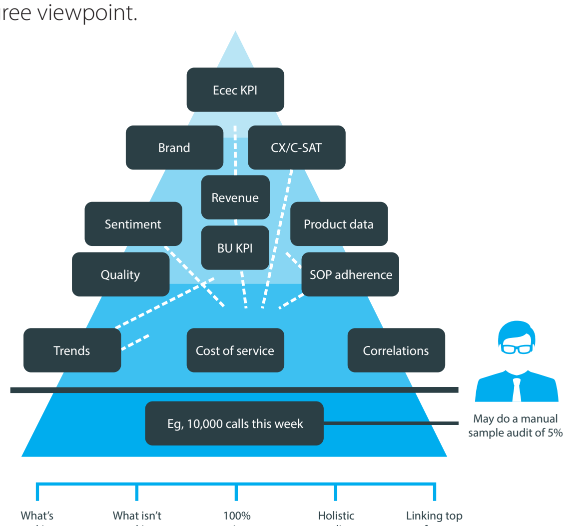


The agent / manager world – After the moment of the call

The leaders of a customer interaction service also do not have it easy. They need to understand in every instance what has happened, what is happening and, the big one, what is going to happen.

Regularly we see this need and the data modelling required to produce executive-level, business unit-level and product-level reports – by service, by language or by geography. What is needed is actionable insight to improve processes, content and products, which will ultimately impact service, support or revenue. But if you don't have the context of the call, and you cannot trust the data input mentioned in the previous chapter or a small sample survey of recordings, the output is questionable. In short, what many organizations need is unparalleled visibility and insight into the REALITY of what is going on, and the ability to react to this insight.

The leadership functions need a platform that completes the digital picture by collecting all the content and the context of the voice channel digitally and then analyzing this data with applied AI and deep learning to identify trends, insights and actions. Furthermore, other comms channels or historical transactions could be integrated for a 360-degree viewpoint.



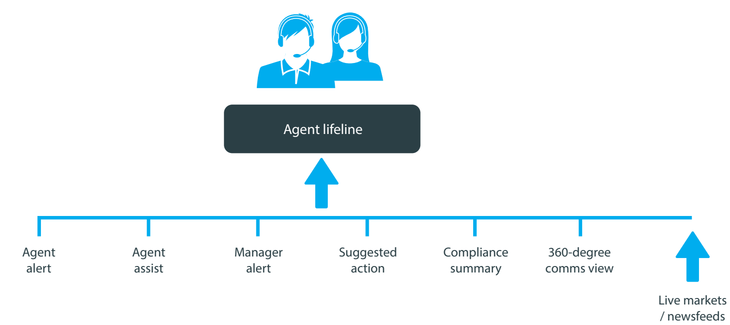
What this can offer to the leadership can be demonstrated by the simple example queries that the customer interaction or executive leaders may want to ask the system:

Q: Show me all calls in the APPLES division that said the phrase "very disappointed" and / or "cancel"
Q: Show me all calls between Jan 4th and Jan 15th with a CX-Sat sentiment of less than 20 per cent
Q: Show me the call profiles of the top 10 per cent of sales performers – identify key words and phrases – detail talk:listen ratio – show their questions
Q: Show all calls that have topic X, Y or Z
Q: Show me Q1 compliance risk calls

Analyze and react – post call and during call

The review and analysis post call and during call has obvious links. The outputs are different as post call focuses on what the organization, team / work-group or an individual can do better in the future. In the real-time scenario, the action is typically centred on what an individual can do NOW as a suggested next action or answer to a question. There are also situations where real time impacts on the wider organization, particularly where there are emergency situations.

The data used to impact change in real-time calls usually has a bias towards connecting with knowledge-base technology, whereas post-call analysis is principally looking at CRM or transaction / ERP /OSS data – although in both cases an open view of system integration is required depending on the service or use case.

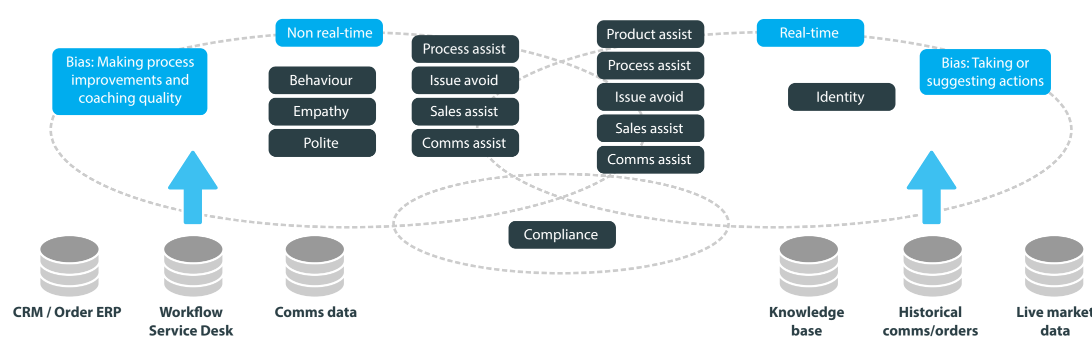


Real-time action:

The real-time action assists your agent with the sheer volume of data they have to mentally process in real time. What was that product update? What was that compliance change? What did the customer say last week or just one minute ago in another comms channel? The task is massive. Add in new staff or less than perfect legacy staff, and you start to see the value of automated prompted suggestions and proposed next actions – this helps the agent, controls the conversation, and increases sales and service metrics.

Non real-time analysis:

The review of staff, calls and performance is a complex and, in many cases, an emotional dialog when there is little data to back up the conversation. Whether the individual or functional analysis is of a sales, service or support nature, the most impactful investment involves learning from the best and changing processes, listening skills, questioning skills, closing skills and all the soft skills around empathy, behavior, demeanour and general behavior. We can now mine every call and link the profile of the calls with the high-performance outcomes (i.e. sales or service performance), whether these are first call resolution rates, call times or revenue conversion targets. Now the quality improvement conversations and actions are no longer emotional, they are factual and digital.



Data disconnects

Most contact centres, formal or informal, sales-centric or service or support-centric, all have a common problem: the data input device in a voice call is 99 per cent analogue - it is a human, unless it is an IVR or conversational bot.

The bottom line is that if the call matters (if there is a call escalation, a complex sale, an important customer or a valuable service) it is best handled by a human.

The issue is that our front-line teams and the back-office teams that build the agent interfaces to capture data are less than perfect and change regularly. Staff change, process change and content change, both internal and external, is constant. Some organizations employ dedicated change management teams just to keep the wheels on to ensure that data is captured in the right way and in the right format. But this does not account for human fatigue, boredom, neglect or simple unawareness.

The first data disconnect is understanding – did the agent understand the context of the call, request, or question? The second data disconnect is data entry – did the agent correctly and fully enter the details of the call into the keyboard? And did this also capture the emotional / behavioral elements of the call?

The first issue is related to tenure and experience as well as change cycles in the product or service your organization provides. The second is widely considered to be a big problem in most organizations. There are two sub categories to data entry, namely:

A. The transactional data
B. The emotional data

Transactional data is known to be a challenge. Many organizations believe they are capturing all the data well, but agents either get fatigued or they learn how to game the system. The first five or six transactions for the same issue may be well documented, but when the 25th call comes in for the same issue, shortcuts can encroach into the process, fields are not filled in fully and the digital picture is blurred or missing completely.

The emotional element is typically captured from the viewpoint of the agent and also focuses on the emotional and CX / C-SAT status of the customer. The emotional elements of the agent are rarely evaluated, neither are the call meta data such as topics discussed, word counts, talk speed, listening ratio, sentiment, empathy across both parties.

Workload

It is a lot to consider. The pressure is on to reduce costs and get rapid sales or rapid service resolution. But is this in context? On one hand, are we encouraging agents to add call data and write up the conversation to add to the digital record, but on the other are we saying get off the call and onto the next?

Call injection is a powerful element in many scenarios where the conversation can be injected into the customer management platform, but also call delta can be identified by the leadership. As calls are now analyzed for content, context, questions and compliance, we are able to see in black and white whether all the data was indeed entered correctly into the system of record.

Value to the wider business

On average, about 60 per cent of customer interaction is still by phone or video. This jumps dramatically when the call matters, i.e. a service failure, a key sales moment or a complaint. So, there is a lot at stake in fully understanding these calls, both in real-time and post-call analysis, for many parts of the organization.

The first is obviously to improve the customer interaction centre itself – its people, processes, recruitment, training, scheduling, routing and so on.

By ensuring we can digitally track all interactions to ensure the agent understood and that the agent entered the correct and full call details [GREEN AND BLUE] and ensuring we can digitally track the emotional elements of the call [GREY], we can optimize our teams and processes dramatically and link our actions to revenue, CX, C-SAT, brand KPIs and operational efficiency metrics.

Typically, the capabilities we have outlined so far are implemented for the use in sales, service and support teams, however there are many outputs of Voice Analytics that are of tremendous value to other teams within an organization. These include, but are not limited to:

- Product marketing teams
- Compliance teams
- Security teams
- Brand teams
- Communications teams
- Finance and operations teams
- HR teams
- R&D / manufacturing teams

What to look for in your evaluation of speech analytics and conversational computing

There are many items to look at, but we have summarized this into ten core focus areas.

1 Architecture / deployment

Before spending any time on the fundamentals of evaluation of a particular solution, ensure it meets your strategy for deployment – do you want a cloud solution or are you mandating an on-premises solution?

2 Commercials

There are hundreds of vendors that do the basics of speech processing, but few that offer the depth of capability needed in the topics addressed in this paper. However, many are seriously damaging to the wallet. Ensure you get a provisional price framework for both software and services before you start.

3 Speech engine

There are three principle questions to ask here: Whose IP is the speech engine (many hide behind a third party); can it be easily tuned to your industry sector; and what languages can it support? Ultimately, start with a proof of concept (POC) to test these capabilities. Quality is key and generic speech engines, in all cases, fail at this hurdle.

4 Conversation engine

Being able to analyze a conversation to separate speakers, identify questions and key phrases, and detect topics, buy signs and complaint signs is critical to being able to analyze performance and make suggested next actions.

5 Sentiment engine

Evaluate the phonic science and AI used to determine sentiment and test this in your POC.

6 Integration capability

In order to draw insight and action, there are critical integrations required into knowledge management, contact centre CRM and ERP technologies.

7 Real-time capabilities

Recommended action is to start your speech analytics investment in post-call analysis – learn how to leverage this vast new set of meta data and then expand into real-time call advice.

8 Ease of use / empowerment

Ensure you can make the appropriate changes to the platform without being beholden to an army of services engineers on their time availability.

9 Customer use-case and relationship

Request a conversation with your chosen vendor's customers. Evaluate the ROI in monetary and CX / C-SAT and staff performance metrics. Also evaluate the relationship they have with their vendor of choice.

10 Vision and roadmap

Don't just evaluate the roadmap and vision for what it is, also evaluate your ability to influence it and how.