

Challenge

In 2004, the Alabama Court System's Child Support Hotline was in desperate need of a makeover. Its DTMF (touch-tone) interface was badly out of date – menu navigation was slow and lengthy, a tedious experience for callers. Callers were also frustrated by the amount of time it took to retrieve information, and the system was often overwhelmed which meant infuriating busy signals

The Hotline handles payment inquiries for 50,000 people every month, to the tune of \$120 million each year. The right solution had to be more efficient and user-friendly than its touch-tone predecessor.

It also had to fit with the court system's recent budget cuts, which were significant. And it had to integrate seamlessly with Microsoft SQL and .Net architecture;

A trial run with custom IVR solutions proved to be proprietary and too costly. A Nuance system was tested, but the total cost of ownership was too high. And it required additional expertise that did not map to available resources.

The right solution was xTalk from ComputerTalk and Microsoft.

Solution

xTalk delivers ComputerTalk's voice I/O (input/output) applications on Microsoft Speech Server. Building on Microsoft's .NET SALT-based platform, ComputerTalk's elegant human interface designs create seamless, natural interactions.

"Since 2001, call volumes have increased 50 percent to more than 80,000 per year," said Mike Carroll, Alabama Court System's CIO. "This swamped our old IBM Rex-based touch-tone system. We needed something that could keep up with demand and provide headroom for future growth."

Callers now dial in and speak their account number and PIN to get payment updates. The system offers five options. Callers speak their selection, and an automated response provides the information requested. Callers can also access 5 live operators and a comprehensive Web site to for more complex inquiries.

Speech makes interactions easy, no more fussing with slow touch-tone menus – callers just say what they need. The system was a good fit despite significant budget cuts, and it integrated so well that Alabama was able to leverage the State's .Net infrastructure; Microsoft C# .Net 2003, Visual Studio .NET 2003 investments to deliver a highly flexible enterprise-level solution. A T1 connection now enables the handling of

24 simultaneous calls. Security is ensured by reliance on user account and PIN numbers.

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ComputerTalk's speech experts and Professional Services team worked in tandem with Alabama's development teams to create the solution. Within days of the project's inception, ComputerTalk created a first class Voice User Interface with speech 'tuning' to increase overall recognition accuracy.


After a seamless installation, the server was fully connected, deployed, and functional within hours. Similar projects can take 3-6 months on average with costly integration and consulting fees; the Child Hotline was up and running in 8 weeks.

"We estimate that our new Microsoft Speech Server 2003 solution will be able to handle the next five years' worth of anticipated growth," says Carroll, "much of it without an increase in operator-assisted backup support."

xTalk opens the door for Alabama's legal system to grow and change. "Future voice-enabled applications are limited only by our imagination," says Carroll. "They could be as sophisticated as being able to reissue lost checks or as simple as providing parking directions for court attendees. Our solution gives us a host of options."

"We could see a 20 – 40% decrease in operator-assisted calls daily," said Carroll. "With more than 1,400 calls per day, it gives us additional capacity to handle other types of phone inquiries from inside our organization and the general public."

COMPANY PROFILE



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Alabama Court System's Child Support Hotline

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Government

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