Assessing Your Telephony Universe

VoiceVision

A 14 Point Diagnostic Evaluation

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Why You Need to Assess Your Telephony Universe

Coordination is Critical

Telephony infrastructure is critical to your business, but telephony deployments are complicated and hard to control end-to-end. Failure to control telephony deployments can lead to runaway costs, unsatisfied customers, and unnecessary exposure to business risk. This paper presents framework for performing an assessment on a typical complex enterprise telephony system in a holistic manner, focusing on efficiency, effectiveness, and risk.

Your organization's **IVR**, **Contact Center**, and **Telco** backbone are individually very powerful technologies, but they must be synchronized to achieve maximum efficiency to avoid unnecessary problems. What kind of problems? We're not talking about fatal problems, but rather chronic, costly inefficiencies.

Working together, these components complement each other and create a magnified benefit. If they're out of sync or maintained in isolation, the system is merely the sum of the parts. Without coordination, the right hand doesn't know what the left hand is doing. Changes to one of the components can adversely affect the other components – and your customers.

> **Enterprise Telephony**
>
> An **Interactive Voice Response** (IVR) system is an automated, computerized telephony system that can provide customers with self-service options for simple and repetitive tasks.
>
> The **Contact Center** is an operational facility where callers can be routed from the IVR to talk to a live agent about more complicated problems.
>
> The telecommunications (**Telco**) backbone, including the PBX switch, telephony trunks like T1s, and the underlying call routing technology, is the hardware and network connectivity upon which the IVR and Contact Center are built.

In a typical enterprise environment, the IT staff may be tasked with maintaining the telephony infrastructure, individual business units may be responsible for operating their own contact centers, and the marketing department may be in charge of the messages heard by the public.

Each group will manage their area of responsibility as effectively as they can in accordance with their own narrow interests. However, there is a risk that when there is no overall owner of the telephony systems enterprise-wide, then there is no one who can control and monitor it well enough to see the inefficiencies that are bound to be present in the system as a whole. Inefficiencies are what cost you time, money and aggravation.

Most managers, if they detect that something is not running smoothly, want to know if their system can be quickly and easily fixed, but in many cases, that's not the right question. You can't fix or even improve a system until it's first *under control*. Having a system under control means you know what you have and you understand how it's currently functioning.

It's possible that the question of whether or not your system is under control has yet to be asked. You can begin by answering these questions:

- *Can you determine quickly and accurately what happened today (or yesterday)?*

- *Can you make changes quickly to the system? What was the last change, and who made it? Can changes be undone easily?*

- *Are you sure changes won't break the system?*

- *Is your system well documented?*

- *Are you prepared for disaster? Do you have a business continuity plan that covers temporary or permanent loss of your deployment as a resource?*

- *Do you have good performance benchmarks? If you think your deployment is good, or bad, or mediocre – against what criteria are you measuring?*

- *Are you comfortable with the number of complaints?*

- *Can users get what they need quickly and easily?*

- *How long does it take to troubleshoot or recover from an outage?*

- *Are your Telco circuit charges regularly reviewed?*

Know What You're Dealing With

You may have good feelings about your system or maybe it seems that your system is a monster that cannot be brought to heel. Perhaps you're new to your organization and you have no idea what you have on your hands. Whether you are confirming your confidence in your system, trying to get a handle on a problem, or simply trying to find out where to start, an assessment is in order. As they say, the journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. **The first step toward mastering your system is determining a verifiable baseline**. **The system needs to be assessed.**

14 Point Diagnostic Evaluation

The 14 points presented in this paper are the same as Vision Point Systems uses for its VoiceVision® evaluations. (For more information, visit http://www.voicevisionivr.com.) These points are derived from accepted quality vectors that would apply when assessing any telephony deployment.

When a doctor evaluates a patient, he checks the vitals, interviews the patient, looks at the medical history, and then begins to see a comprehensive picture of health or illness. In the same way, the 14 points are your system's vital signs. An independent assessment that looks at these points will help you evaluate the quality of your business' telephony systems. "Quality" can have varied meanings, but we use

the word to mean *controlled cost, enhanced customer experience, and managed risk*.

The business benefits of operating a high-quality system are clear:

- Cost is about ROI – efficient use of assets
- Customer experience translates into revenue
- Managed risk equals predictability

In order conduct an assessment, you must analyze your systems and operations on each of the 14 points defined below. For each, ask yourself the following questions: *Am I neglecting this area? Do I spend an inordinate amount of time worrying about this at a detriment to other areas? Is there a clear owner in my organization for this aspect of the systems? Who else in my organization is affected by good or poor performance in this area?*

It's insufficient to look at any one point in isolation. You might be content and confident knowing that your IT staff have every software function, network connection, and business stakeholder's home address documented in your vault of specifications ready for lookup. Have you actually tried making a change to your system? If it takes you longer to find which volume a configuration item is documented in than it does to make the actual change, then you might not be as set as you thought.

The 14 quality points can be broken into a few key groups, *Cost Drivers*, *Risk Drivers*, *Customer Experience Drivers*, and *Super-Drivers*, which are business-wide areas at risk for inefficiency.

VoiceVision® 14 Point Key Groups			
Cost Drivers	**Customer Experience**	**Risk Drivers**	**Super-Drivers**
• IVR Maintenance • Agent Efficiency • IVR Efficiency	• Voice User Interface • Utility • Leveraging Technology	• Auditability • Flexibility • Business Continuity	• Testability • Capacity • Documentation • Change Control • Strategic Fit

Cost Drivers

🔹 IVR Maintenance

Maintainability starts with design. Have you set up your IVR with business-logic configurability in mind or do you have to execute a vendor change order every time you want to make a change? Has your system been developed with standards like VoiceXML or do you rely on "that one guy" for development? The system that is well documented is easier (and cheaper) to maintain. When a system is well documented, troubleshooting is quicker and easier, and changes are less risky.

🔹 Agent Efficiency

There's more to agent efficiency than getting them on and off the phone quickly, and there are more drains on agents' time than bathroom and coffee breaks. Optimal agent efficiency begins in the IVR where routine tasks can be handled without agent involvement. From there, look inside the Contact Center: Do your systems help the agent get their job done or do they get in the way? Do you have the right training in place? Are your metrics the right ones? When your IVR and Contact Center are tuned together, you get maximum efficiency.

🔹 IVR Efficiency

IVR efficiency is an art: provide as much functionality as possible to users while keeping the call flow as simple as possible. When IVR menus get convoluted and overly complex, users get lost. They lose time, they get angry, and they'll probably end up connected to the wrong agent. When the IVR is optimized, you'll see a cascade of benefits. Perhaps the most direct benefit is reduced toll-free minutes charges. Are you doing all you can to shorten the time that callers are on the line with the IVR and Contact Center combined?

Customer Satisfaction Drivers

🔹 Voice User Interface

A well-designed voice user interface (VUI) is a powerful tool for increasing customer satisfaction. In an IVR with an intuitive call flow, users can help themselves and do it quickly. While they appreciate good service from agents, they generally would avoid them if possible. A poor interface will cost you! Customers will leave if they can, and if they can't, they'll take it out on the contact center agents. Even if the agents handle this – which they surely can – it will take time and time is, as it always has been, money. On the other hand, your company's voice is part of your brand. Every interaction affects loyalty one way or the other. Are you managing your contact center and IVR with this in mind?

🔹 Customer Utility

Forget technology for a second and think about what your customers want to do. Systems need to be evaluated with the customer in mind and, if possible, *by* the customer. Just because your system is not throwing errors or shutting itself off mid-call doesn't mean it's a good system. How do your customers like it?

An Optimized IVR will be seen as resource for your customers, not a burden. Contact Center agents are happier because the calls they get are the good ones, callers with more interesting problems and special cases. Agent job satisfaction increases because they are providing real and immediate benefit to the callers and performing tasks the automated system can't handle as well.

🔹 Leverage Technology for Customer Experience

Technology should serve people, not the other way around. Are you saving agent time with screen pops? Does your website have a click-to-talk option? Can agents IM with customers? Have you considered a mobile app? Would any of these benefit your customers? These are just a few questions that can be asked about technology to determine whether you have a contemporary deployment.

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Risk Drivers

☑ Auditability

Control of your system means you can see inside the black box. If a problem is reported, you need to be able to quickly and accurately determine what really happened. Auditability means being able to recreate historical behavior from the system's own internal records. Systems without this capability suffer from increased troubleshooting efforts, reduced internal confidence, and even potential legal or regulatory exposure. Have you planned for all of the appropriate logging and reporting for running a quality system?

☑ Flexibility

Every day brings its own challenges, and not all of this constitutes a disaster. Have you set up your system, processes, and personnel to absorb the shocks of everyday life? Do your systems allow employees to work from a secondary location in case of a facility outage, and do you have the procedures and training in place to do so? Are you taking advantage of modern technology like VOIP to allow mobility?

☑ Business Continuity

IT consultants like to talk about the "smoking hole" scenario when it comes to disaster recovery. The first question then is: do you have a disaster recovery plan in place? If you do, it likely covers the complete failover scenario. Does it cover the shades of grey between the prank call and nuclear fallout, though? What's your plan if your telco lines are cut or the servers running your modern PBX get fried from a power surge? An IT organization should take a risk-based approach to this type of planning, looking at both likelihood and impact of events.

Super-Drivers

▪ Testability

Are you confident in your team's ability to test changes to your IVR? Do you test changes made to call center operations or Telco infrastructure? Are your test efforts well-documented? Much like maintainability, system testability starts with design. Have you designed a system that can be tested efficiently and completely within your organization? Are you putting the right amount of effort into testing your telephony systems, especially in light of the possible public perception of a noticeable defect? Is your test plan commensurate with the expectations of regulatory obligations? The consequences of poor testing are far-reaching.

▪ Capacity

Do you have enough capacity in your IVR, Contact Center, and corporate telecom infrastructure? Do you have too much? How would you know? Scalability is somewhat of a buzzword, but the consequences of rigidity are real. Have you looked at provisions for temporary capacity? Is the "cloud" something viable when it comes to your telephony?

▪ Documentation

Having mounds of paper in a file room or gigabytes of Visio diagrams on a file server is not the same as having good, usable documentation. The goal of documentation should be to provide a model of your system so that you can say what is supposed to be happening at any point in time. Is your documentation equally complete and accurate for your IVR, Contact Center operations, and telecom infrastructure? Do areas of your operation get neglected because they are not well-understood?

🔹 Change Control

What was the last change you made? How easy is it to make changes? Is the scope of responsibility clear between all of the business-process owners? How do you determine what changes can be made as a part of normal operations and which changes require formal change control? It's quite possible to lock things down to the point where your customers suffer because your organization can't adapt to real-world conditions. On the other hand, it's also possible to operate in a Wild West environment where there is no predictability and consistency. How do you strike the balance in your organization?

🔹 Strategic Fit

Where does your telephony deployment fit into your organization's strategic goals? The amount of emphasis that an organization puts on each of the other 13 points will vary. An organization with an intense focus on customer service should emphasize the publicly visible aspects. Companies who work in a rigorous regulatory environment should focus on the internal process-oriented points. That said, there should be a stated position within your organization for the operational goals for any external-facing IVRs and phone menus, Contact Centers, and Telecom IT.

The Problem with Doing Assessments yourself

We've all heard the old adage, "The lawyer who represents himself has a fool for a client." From lawyers to doctors to editors, there's a strong precedent for turning your hard work – your good idea, your can't-miss screenplay, your brilliant invention – over to an independent 3rd party for an honest and unbiased evaluation. Why do we do this? The obvious reason is that once we've buried ourselves in a project, it can be very difficult to see the project objectively anymore. We ignore faults, we unconsciously fill in missing details, we downplay risks, and we fail to ask the obvious questions. If you're a manager, you can have the same problem getting honest evaluations from subordinate managers. They may be loath to admit that the system they support has problems. This also assumes that all agree on what the definition of "good" or "bad" actually is. Without a benchmark, comparative terms like good and bad don't mean much.

The Bottom Line

The bottom line that we hope to underscore is that telephony deployments are complex and must be coordinated to gain the maximum return on the investment in the hardware and software. This return is measured on minimized operating costs, maximized customer satisfaction and mitigated risks. To accomplish this, your systems must first be brought under control and understood by all business stakeholders. Only then can they be effectively managed and optimized.

The VoiceVision® 14-Point Diagnostic represents what we feel are the critical "levers" for operating a value-adding telephony system in your organization. The first step is to arrive at a concrete understanding of where you are today. From there, it's up to you to adjust these levers – increase or decrease priority, budget, training, responsibility, measurement, and accountability – to end up with the system that provides maximum ROI, the most highly-satisfied customers, and the confidence that your system is under control.

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For more information about the VoiceVision® 14 Point Diagnostic Evaluation,

visit http://www.voicevisionivr.com

or call Vision Point Systems at: (866) 621-1607

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