

Case Study

Success Story: Amtrak

In order to control costs and provide a great customer experience, Amtrak invested in an Empirix Monitoring Solution. Automating the monitoring system speeds discovery of issues so they can be fixed before they affect customers.

Amtrak Automates Management of Speech Applications with Empirix

In today's travel market, customers expect to be able to book trips by phone or online; and they expect smooth, reliable, error-free contact center connections that are available around the clock.

The call center experience is a vital part of the overall travel experience and poor service can cause a traveler to switch providers just as quickly as lost luggage or unnecessary delays.

"We take a lot of pride in the quality of our automated customer service solutions," says Rob Early, lead IVR engineer at Washington, D.C.-based Amtrak. He should be proud; Amtrak's speech-enabled interactive voice response (IVR) systems seamlessly support two national contact centers (Riverside, Calif. and Philadelphia, Penn.) that together handle an average of 45,000 calls per day.

For Early and Amtrak, controlling costs is especially important because, like the company as a whole, Amtrak's contact centers must operate on the tightest possible budgets. As a creation of Congress, the company

depends on direct support from the federal government to provide adequate capital funding and annual operating subsidies. Though it is the nation's only major passenger rail corporation, Amtrak nonetheless operates in a highly dynamic environment where it competes directly with the airlines. Therefore the company must offer first class customer service. It isn't an easy job. Managers in every aspect of Amtrak operations – including IT and customer relations management – must make every penny count.

"Both our telephone and Web-based reservation systems need to be as efficient, reliable, and easy to use as anyone's, but we have to do it for less," says Early. "It is essential that we are proactively ensuring a great customer experience. We want to know about emerging issues before they degrade further and affect our customers. The OneSight Voice Engine from Empirix gives us the data we need to accomplish this."

First Class Service

To provide customers with 24 hour service, Amtrak deployed an automated phone-based reservation system

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Rob Early
lead IVR engineer
Amtrak



COMPANY

National Railroad Passenger Corporation

INDUSTRY

A nationwide rail network, serving over 500 destinations in 46 states and three Canadian provinces on over 21,000 miles of track. An average of more than 74,000 passengers ride more than 300 Amtrak trains per day.

www.amtrak.com

EMPIRIX SOLUTIONS

Empirix OneSight Monitoring Solution

complete with state of the art speech recognition technology. It offers customers the ability to check arrival and departure status, look up schedules and fares, as well as make reservations. It is extremely well designed with tremendous attention paid to creating an engaging user interface, especially for complex reservation transactions. It features advanced speech recognition technology from Nuance deployed on IVR systems from Interveroice.

From the beginning, Amtrak recognized the importance of incorporating best-practice testing and monitoring methods into their daily operations. Early manages a small team tasked with constantly updating the IVRs with special promotions, weather related advisories, and more. They are also responsible for system maintenance and upgrades as well as the continuous tweaking of the intricate speech applications. On average, changes are made to production systems every 10 days. Pre-deployment testing is essential for assuring this process and continuous monitoring ensures that issues are detected before they affect customers.

“In the beginning, our primary approach had been manual testing and monitoring,” says Early. “It was reactive, since manual monitoring told us something was wrong after callers were already being impacted. Plus it was too time-consuming and labor-intensive to be practical. Because the automated voice solutions are such

an important piece of our customer service operation, we wanted a proactive approach to managing quality. We needed to establish performance benchmarks that would allow us to set ongoing performance standards. We knew automation would be more efficient and effective.”

A Comprehensive Solution based on Patented Empirix Hammer® Technology

Amtrak began evaluating automated monitoring solutions. “We quickly found out that many of the vendors couldn’t give us the data – or the control – that we needed,” says Early.

“As we delved into the RFP process, we found that the OneSight Voice Engine solution from Empirix offered real advantages. Empirix’s Hammer technology has a great reputation in the telecommunications industry – it really means something to say an application or a system has been ‘Hammer tested.’ We liked that the OneSight Voice Engine was able to emulate the various aspects of caller behavior that we monitor, including financial transactions, and could be programmed to combine both speech and touchpad entries in a single call script. That type of accurate and realistic emulation was very important to us, and none of the other tools and services that we evaluated could offer that.”

Early points out that Amtrak had several reasons for choosing to work with the company. “Empirix was very responsive throughout the process.

Their proposal was very thorough and detailed, and their team demonstrated a real understanding of their products’ capabilities and mapped them to our specific needs. The Empirix team was especially sensitive to our need to meet tight deadlines, and they helped us be successful. Implementation was very smooth,” Early recalls. “Empirix assembled a team for us that included an installer and a trainer. I mapped our environment, defined our production management goals, and gave them a rough idea of what we required. When they arrived, they immediately began analyzing our systems to figure out exactly how the test scripts should be written to achieve our goals. We installed the OneSight Voice Engine system; they configured the software and began running scripts. The Empirix trainer then used the same scripts as a basis to train us thoroughly in the classroom on the Hammer CallMaster development environment. Very quickly, we were able to start writing our own scripts, test them and tweak them.”

Empirix Keeps Production Systems on Track

After notifying managers through Amtrak’s contact center operation about the Empirix management solution, Amtrak put the OneSight Voice Engine system into full service.

“Regular monitoring allows us to drill down into areas that might be giving us specific performance problems that could lead to failures if left unchecked. Because we’ve programmed the sys-

tem to call into each IVR once every twenty minutes, we can catch many emerging issues before they become problems that would adversely impact our customers," says Early. "Then, using the compiled performance data that the OneSight Voice Engine stores for us, we can quickly diagnose issues and collaborate with all the relevant technical staff. We can look at the severity of the failure and figure out why one area of an IVR was affected while others weren't. We can then look into what we need to do to repair the problem. Ninety percent of the diagnostic testing that Amtrak does to find problems between its IVR applications and its back-end data systems are now fully automated thanks to Empirix," Early notes, adding, "That gives us peace of mind, and more staff time to focus on new initiatives."

Even though Early has become comfortable writing his own scripts and analyzing the resulting data, he continues to draw on Empirix expertise. Recently, Empirix created a custom alerting solution for Amtrak that warns staff when a variety of SNMP (simple network management protocol) server conditions occur.

"The customer support has been terrific," noted Early. "They're always available by phone, and they can usually answer questions and solve problems on the first call. If they can't, they stay with it and get back to us quickly."

"No question about it," concludes Early. "I would tell any company in a similar situation that Empirix knows what they're doing, offers a level of value that's hard to find elsewhere and is extremely easy to work with."

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