



Home Retail Group Reaps the Rewards of a New Approach to Customer Contact

Proactive, automated outbound contact using hosted interactive voice messaging (IVM) and SMS solutions from VoiceSage has transformed customer experience for the Group.

Home Retail Group is a leading UK home and general merchandise retailer whose brands include Argos, Homebase and Habitat.

The Group's Customer and Financial Services organisation handles 10 million inbound calls a year and 2 million order and delivery e-mail enquiries. It employs 1,800 staff across three contact centres in Widnes, Bolton and Stafford.

Proactive customer service

To maintain and improve performance, and to continue to raise levels of customer satisfaction, Home Retail Group is always looking for new ways to enhance efficiency while improving customer experience. Following a personal recommendation, the Customer and Financial Services management team decided to take a look at interactive voice messaging and text (SMS) messaging solutions from VoiceSage. This technology would enable the Group to pre-empt routine customer order and delivery queries with proactive outbound messages.

Initially, the Home Retail Group deployed interactive voice messaging and SMS text messaging technology in its telebooking facility. Traditionally, agents would call customers to confirm order delivery dates and times. Using a dialler, agents were typically achieving only a 30-40% success rate in getting through to people

Within four weeks of using VoiceSage's solutions to automate its customer contact communications, by sending a combination of text messages and pre-recorded voice messages, Home Retail Group was achieving the same number of customer contacts per hour as they did through their dialler system. Now, they have a significantly higher hit rate and have reduced the amount of their agents' time that is tied up in delivery contact activities. Telephony costs have significantly decreased too, as 60% of contacts were now being made via SMS.

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Mark Fox, Real-Time Manager
Home Retail Group's
Contact Centres





Keeping customers informed

Guided by VoiceSage, the Home Retail Group expanded interactive voice messaging and SMS text messaging technology to other parts of its contact centre operations. Because VoiceSage's system can be easily configured and adjusted by users, contact centre managers have found they can dynamically apply the technology in numerous different situations – for example, to set up ad-hoc messages to quickly inform customers about unforeseen delivery delays.

In January 2011, when the UK was brought to a standstill by heavy snow, the Group was able to achieve contact with 100% of its customers. It issued over 85,000 messages in one week, and was able to answer 90% of incoming calls, thanks to VoiceSage. By contrast, a similar level of national disruption five years previously had caused chaos. That time the contact centre achieved just 25,000 outbound calls, with only a 35% success rate of getting through to someone. Inbound call traffic meanwhile was at an all-time high as customers phoned to chase late deliveries, often having to wait for their calls to be answered.

Today the biggest use of interactive voice messaging and SMS text messaging is in informing customers about their two-hour delivery window on the day before a shipment is scheduled. This activity can account for some 40,000 outbound customer contacts each day which would otherwise have to be made by live agents. This proactive service not only improves customer satisfaction by keeping people informed about the delivery service, it also discourages customers from calling the contact centre to chase up their orders.

Essential business tool

For Mark Fox, Real-Time Manager for Home Retail Group's contact centres, VoiceSage is an essential business tool. "The huge benefit is that we can proactively contact customers en masse without impacting the front line," he says. "The major reason we chose VoiceSage in particular is because of the ability to set up campaigns on our own – ad hoc and very quickly. With rival solutions we would have to put in a request to the service provider and wait for them to do it. We wanted the freedom that VoiceSage gives us."

Currently VoiceSage is helping Home Retail Group to find a new 'voice' for Argos from within the company. The 'voice of Argos' will be used to record all customer voice messages which ensures consistency for outbound messages and positively reflects the brand. "We really appreciate the advice we get from VoiceSage," Mark concludes. "We also get a lot of support whenever we're trying something new. VoiceSage is also a very affordable and measurable solution. When we started using it, we bought in bulk - specifying a number of calls and messages - but now we pay as we go. This helps us calculate the cost of campaigns and is really helpful from a business case point of view."

AT A GLANCE

Application

- Interactive Voice Messaging
- SMS Messaging

Business Challenges

- Customer service too passive
- High volumes of incoming calls for routine queries
- Agents' time not optimised

Benefits

- Reduced inbound and outbound calls
- Simple, transparent, usage-based costs for easy accountability
- Increased customer satisfaction