M&S: Calling on Google Cloud for personalized customer service that's both digital and human

Marks & Spencer implements Google speech recognition automate calls to increase personalization, and better serve its customers through enabled contact ce

M&S

EST. 1884

About Marks & Spencer

Established in 1884, M&S is a British multinational retailer specializing in selling high-quality clothing, home, and food products.

Industries: Retail & Consumer Goods

Location: United Kingdom

Location: United Kingdom

DVELP

About DVELP

Google Cloud results

- Improves efficiency by automating 13 in-store switchboards in the UK and Ireland and migrating stock availability calls to central M&S contact center

- Reduces store call volume by 50% by routing more than 7 million calls through Dialogflow, under Contact Center AI

- Enables call center staff

Enables customers match four mc

DVELP builds real-time communication solutions for heavily regulated industries by partnering with clients and focusing on features that render business value to customers.

DVELP

About DVELP

Google Cloud Platform (https://cloud.google.com/)

Contact Center AI (https://cloud.google.com/solutions/contact-center/)

Dialogflow Enterprise Edition (https://cloud.google.com/dialogflow-enterprise/)

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event-related

vocabulary

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"Hello, Marks & Spencer. How may we help you?"

As one of the biggest and best-loved retail brands in the UK, Marks & Spencer (M&S) (https://www.marksandspencer.com/) is known for the personalized service it provides to its 30 million loyal customers. For 135 years and in 57 countries around the world, M&S has worked to meet and exceed customer expectations for quality and service. Since the advent of the telephone, this has meant cheerfully servicing customers who call in to M&S branches or into their contact centers, no matter what their request might be.

"Retail is in a state of flux and M&S is transforming to better serve our customers so that we can compete and win. Automating calls into our stores with Google voice recognition gives us every opportunity to get things right for our customers and keep them coming back again and again."

—Akash Parmar, Enterprise Architect (Digital Customer Engagement), Marks & Spencer

The company now has a goal of bringing one third of its business online by 2022. In order to engage more customers online, it has opened a new voice channel hosted on Google Cloud. The company previously had switchboards in 13 different stores across the UK and Ireland (UKI), handling up to nine million calls a year. But as its retail offering evolved across multiple channels, it was becoming increasingly difficult to quickly and effectively answer customer service requests using an outdated switchboard model. Customers might call in to order an outfit they had seen in a store, to inquire about returning a dress they bought online, or to recover a lost umbrella in a food hall. Each of these different requests required a different routing response from staff, and if the company didn't act soon, it knew that the cost of managing the increase in call volume would lead to a significant cost impact. M&S decided it was time to make a technological leap forward to meet customers' expectations in the new, omnichannel retail environment.

"Retail is in a state of flux and M&S is transforming to better serve our customers so that we can compete and win," says Akash Parmar, Enterprise Architect for Digital Customer Engagement at M&S. "Automating calls into our stores with Google voice recognition gives us every opportunity to get things right for our customers and keep them coming back again and again."

Boosting opportunities for customer engagement with voice recognition

M&S customers were used to dealing with their local store for anything they needed. But as stores were completely separate from the online business, customers weren't able to purchase something they'd seen online by calling stores because the store staff didn't have access to platforms needed to place an online order securely. For a company that places a very high importance on customer experience, this was unacceptable.

Akash Parmar, Enterprise Architect for Customer Engagement, was set a the goal by Chris McGrath, M&S Programme Manager, to ensure that the right channel and the right level of assistance was available to customers at any point before, during, or after purchase. Akash set himself the challenge of building a platform that could adapt to all of these channels and scale very quickly.

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platform. DVELP removed that obstacle. It understood what we wanted to achieve and how Google Voice APIs and Twilio could get us there. Whatever we want, DVELP builds it for us. DVELP always presents options, never problems."

—Akash Parmar, Enterprise Architect (Digital Customer Engagement), Marks & Spencer

In 2018, Akash reached out to Google Cloud partner DVELP (https://dvelp.co.uk/), one of the UK's leading experts on the Twilio (https://www.twilio.com/) programmable contact center platform and Google speech recognition technology. DVELP recommended a Google Cloud (https://cloud.google.com/)-based natural

language speech recognition platform that leverages the <u>audio stream intent detection functionality</u> (https://cloud.google.com/dialogflow/docs/detect-intent-stream)
in the <u>Contact Center AI</u> (https://cloud.google.com/solutions/contact-center/)
solution, <u>Dialogflow</u> (https://cloud.google.com/dialogflow/), as the heart of an inbound-call-handling strategy. This strategy was designed to improve routing accuracy, give customers more self-service options, and increase analyst visibility into customer journeys.

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Using Google speech recognition to improve customer experience

M&S wanted to use natural language to enable customers to speak and state what help they required rather than choose from a list of options. This would help them answer the millions of calls coming in and figure out what customers needed quickly.

In order to do that, DVELP needed to consider how best to address tying customer intent to actions, while

maintaining flexibility. DVELP recommended the
unconventional choice of not referencing intent in the
application layer, but mapping the available actions to
the information required to perform them. These
actions were then used to build a "declarative
dictionary" for the customer service team.

By focusing on actions rather than intents, the solution
enables the customer services team to configure
actions to intents in virtually any combination of key-
value pairs. Leveraging the fact that Dialogflow can
detect and respond to customer intents in real time,
M&S has already reached 92% accuracy in translating
customer declarations to actionable intents.

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Akash recalls that once customers became comfortable with the prompt, "in a few words, how may we help you?" they started providing simple, concise responses, and the customer learning curve quickly leveled out. At that point, Google Cloud speech recognition and Dialogflow took over. "The technology worked perfectly and the result was like magic," says Akash.

"With Google Cloud speech recognition and Contact Center AI solutions such as Dialogflow, there's no information that we can't make sense of," he says. "No matter where you call from, who you are, your age, your gender: you speak, and we understand."

Enabling self-service contact center improvements with Dialogflow

It was important to M&S that contact center employees be self-sufficient in updating the platform to reflect changes in demand. They needed to be able to easily react to a spike in inquiries about a special offer, for example, without relying on the engineering team. At the same time, neither Akash nor the DVELP team wanted the staff to have to learn error-prone JSON inside contexts, or write responses in order to get necessary information from customers.

DVELP's creative solution was to fill out the "Action and parameters" section of every intent. This is usually reserved for collecting information from customer declarations, but was also easily adapted to implementing custom key-value pairs. This is particularly helpful in making sure that the contact center is ready to handle new promotions as they arise. As sales and special events are communicated to the contact center from the head office, staff can program specific vocabulary directly into Dialogflow, thanks to Contact Center AI, ensuring that the M&S system is immediately ready to handle related customer calls.

Rolling out the platform to the UK and Ireland

In just a few months after going live, calls are being efficiently routed to the contact center and its existing customer service platform. At the contact center, staff can quickly and easily respond to customer requests, place orders, and process returns. Thanks to the

natural language capabilities of Google Cloud, a simple customer request like "order the red children's dress in the Bath high street window in size six" not only gets correctly routed, but provides data points for future personalized interactions.

Being able to accurately recognize customer intent 92% of the time after less than four months since deployment is an important milestone for M&S. With a concurrent 89% voice-to-text accuracy rate for Dialogflow transcriptions, M&S has rolled out the successful speech recognition platform to all of its stores in UK and Ireland and customer service contact centers. Akash is so pleased with the performance of the new Google Cloud platform that he's focusing on what new functionality he can add next to improve customer experience even more. "We're working on collecting product codes from customers using natural language so we can give them stock availability details," he shares. "We also want to use Google Cloud to enable a more conversational experience when customers are searching for help or FAQs on our website. At the same time, we're looking at Contact Center AI and Dialogflow to provide a virtual assistant experience for our webchat journey. Thanks to our new voice solution, we can clearly understand the key issues that our customers face on a day-to-day basis; the aim now is to start solving these issues through self-service and automation."

Learn More

Reach out to our team to see how Google Cloud can help your business.

https://cloud.google.com/contact →