



Overview

Country: USA

Industry

Home Improvement
Retail

Customer Profile

ServiceMagic is an online marketplace where homeowners can find residential contractors and home service professionals.

Business Situation

The company needed to speed up lead turnaround time, find a more efficient way to schedule contractor appointments and match to homeowners, quickly orient new contractors and improve fee collection rates.

Solution

The company and Gold Systems developed four powerful solutions with Microsoft Speech Server 2004: outbound dialing, automated appointments, one-to-one matching, contractor orientation/voice log.

Benefits

- Lead turnaround jumps 180 percent
- Solutions scalable, reliable, updatable.

Lead Time Turnaround Improves By 180 Percent with IVR Solutions

“Lead turnaround has improved 180 percent. Each of the 40,000 daily leads gets to a contractor in less than a minute. Homeowners can actually get a call while reading the ‘thank you’ web page!”

Susan Harries
Director of Quality Assurance
ServiceMagic, Inc.

ServiceMagic®, Inc., headquartered in Golden, Colo., is one of the nation’s leading online marketplaces connecting homeowners with prescreened and customer-rated home service professionals. The company addresses more than 500 different home service needs ranging from simple home repairs and maintenance to complete home remodeling projects. The company, along with its IT partner, Gold Systems—a Microsoft Certified Partner—, developed powerful new IVR solutions utilizing Microsoft Speech Server 2004: a high volume outbound calling system to handle 40,000 calls per day, an automated appointment scheduler, a one-to-one matching service, and a contractor orientation. The company saw its lead turnaround time improve 180 percent and development efforts evolve into a more reliable, scalable and fast-response environment.

“Cost structure and scalability were large considerations for choosing this Microsoft and Gold Systems solution. Speech Server 2004 is a flexible development environment. Code changes can be made quickly to keep up with the needs of our customers.”

Susan Harries
Director of Quality Assurance
ServiceMagic, Inc.

Situation

ServiceMagic is a provider of household brokering services, and has become a leading resource for connecting homeowners with prescreened service professionals such as home improvement contractors.

Homeowners complete home service requests through ServiceMagic’s website (www.servicemagic.com) and the requests are then distributed as customer leads to service professionals via e-mail, cell phone text-messages, fax and telephone. To reduce lead distribution times and associated support, ServiceMagic sought a solution capable of handling 40,000 daily telephone leads per day, the telephone being one of the easier ways for home service professionals who are mobile during the majority of the day to receive and act on new leads.

Early on, the company realized the importance of streamlining many of the processes that directly and indirectly affected this high volume of activity. Overall the company wanted to address challenges in four areas:

- **Speed up lead turnaround time**
- **Find a more efficient way to schedule contractor appointments**
- **More efficiently match contractors to homeowner requests**
- **Quickly orient new contractors**

For example, ServiceMagic knew that Interactive Voice Response (IVR) solutions had the potential to solve the turnaround times for high call volumes. Initially, ServiceMagic created IVR applications around an Edify-based solution. However, “batch” lead delivery limited response times and generated delays of up to three hours, a situation not tolerated by the requesting homeowner or the responding home service professional.

Scheduling a specific appointment between a contractor and homeowner was also an area the ServiceMagic wanted to improve to help avoid the “telephone tag” situation that often

occurs when trying to match schedules of two or more parties.

Other concerns for better matching requests with contractors and new contractor orientation drove ServiceMagic to seek a more robust IVR solution.

Solution

ServiceMagic investigated ways in which to more quickly connect homeowner requests to the appropriate home service professionals. After evaluating various interactive voice response (IVR) systems, it chose Gold Systems, a 15-year speech application expert experienced in developing solutions integrating Microsoft Speech Server 2004. Over the last 18 months, four IVR solutions have been deployed.

Outbound Dialing

Gold Systems created an Outbound Dialing application that notifies service professionals of a lead or an appointment automatically through Microsoft Speech Server 2004. This solution supports 96 ports which can handle 40,000 outbound calls a day.

When a customer service request is sent through ServiceMagic’s website, Microsoft Speech Server 2004 makes an outbound telephone call to a home service professional. After receiving the call, the professional can speak a request, initiating a return call to the homeowner. Home service professionals are connected to homeowners quickly, eliminating the need to remember phone numbers or even dial the phone. This is particularly helpful to professionals when they are on site working on a customer’s job.

The Outbound Dialing application uses the following Speech Server technologies:

- Built on Microsoft Windows Server 2003.
- Custom SALT messages transfer service professionals to a lead distribution system where they can get leads and appointments.

- Natural Language Speech Recognition recognizes natural language spoken input.
- Text-to-Speech is used to speak prompts to service professionals.
- Intel® NetMerge™ Call Manager is the telephony interface software that makes the outbound telephone calls.
- The application was created with the Microsoft Speech Application Software Development Kit (SASDK) that facilitates the rapid addition of speech interfaces in a Microsoft .NET development environment.

Automated Appointment Scheduling

A proprietary scheduling system is also integrated into the outbound calling solution. If a person is reached it gives them three choices for appointment times. If an answering machine is reached it leaves them a message to go to the ServiceMagic website and arrange appointment times which in turn, notifies the contractor via the IVR scheduling application.

Exact Matchsm: One-to-One Matching Service

ServiceMagic has extended its traditional lead service to a new one-to-one matching service in partnership with Citysearch®, a leading local search service, providing up-to-date information on business, retail, travel and professional services. Exact Match delivers a one-to-one match for consumers searching online for local home service professionals. With Exact Match, ServiceMagic creates and hosts a member business's web page (containing profile information on the service professional, including Customer Ratings). ServiceMagic optimizes the placement of the individual member web pages to appear within the search results of local search engines and online directories. The web pages are now available within Citysearch, enabling Citysearch to provide its consumers with a direct connection to prescreened and customer-rated home service professionals. Exact Match is viewable on all 141 city guides in the Home &

Garden category to which Citysearch provides content.

When a consumer conducts an online search for local home service professionals and clicks to review the ServiceMagic member's Exact Match web page, they can directly connect with the service professional by either submitting an online service request or calling a local phone number provided by ServiceMagic. Both options route the consumer through a short interview to confirm the request matches the service professional's work type and geographic area. Following confirmation, ServiceMagic connects the consumer directly to the service professional. Home service professionals are then charged for the consumer lead.

Contractor Orientation

It's important for new home service professionals to get connected and oriented about how ServiceMagic works. An automated orientation call welcomes the contractor and explains the terms and conditions.

Benefits

ServiceMagic has seen significant improvement in the lead turnaround time for service professionals. Also, the IVR development environment is enterprise level quality and powerfully flexible.

Lead turnaround jumps 180 percent

Under ServiceMagic's previous IVR application, leads were sent out in batches that were often delayed as long as three hours. With Gold Systems' outbound dialing system based on Microsoft Speech Server 2004 each of the 40,000 daily leads are immediately sent to contractors for follow-up.

"Lead turnaround has improved 180 percent. Each of the 40,000 daily leads gets to a contractor in less than a minute," says Susan Harries, Director of Quality Assurance at ServiceMagic. "Homeowners can actually get a call while reading the 'thank you' web page!"

"We update our entire code base weekly. Our Microsoft Speech Server-based solutions easily keeps up."

Susan Harries
 Director of Quality Assurance
 ServiceMagic, Inc.

For more information

For more information about Microsoft products and services, call the Microsoft Sales Information Center at (800) 426-9400. In Canada, call the Microsoft Canada Information Centre at (877) 568-2495. Customers who are deaf or hard-of-hearing can reach Microsoft text telephone (TTY/TDD) services at (800) 892-5234 in the United States or (905) 568-9641 in Canada. Outside the 50 United States and Canada, please contact your local Microsoft subsidiary. To access information using the World Wide Web, go to <http://www.microsoft.com>.

For more information about ServiceMagic products and services, call corporate communications (800) 474-1596 or visit the Web site at <http://www.servicemagic.com>.

For more information about Microsoft Speech Server, visit the Web site at <http://www.microsoft.com/speech>.

Scalable, reliable, easily updated

Speech Server 2004 is scalable and reliable according to ServiceMagic's in-house IT team. CPUs can be added for back-up and to handle more call volume.

"Cost structure and scalability were large considerations for choosing this Microsoft and Gold Systems solution," notes Harries. "Speech Server 2004 is a flexible development environment. Code changes can be made quickly to keep up with the needs of our customers."

And Harries is quite serious when she talks about the need to keep pace with changes and customers.

"We update our entire code base weekly," says Harries. "Our Microsoft Speech Server-based solutions easily keep up."

Harries continues: "The ability to rapidly update our code base and IVR applications in response to changing needs is at the heart of our success as a company."

Harries also had high praise for its IT partner, Gold Systems.

"Gold Systems provided excellent development support for our initial solution as well as thorough training that has allowed us to maintain and create new IVR solutions in-house."

Microsoft Windows Server System

Microsoft Windows Server System™ is the comprehensive, integrated, and interoperable server infrastructure that helps reduce the complexity and costs of building, deploying, connecting, and operating agile business solutions. Windows Server System helps customers create new value for their business through the strategic use of their IT assets. With the Windows Server™ platform as the foundation, Windows Server System

delivers dependable infrastructure for data management and analysis; enterprise integration; customer, partner, and employee portals; business process automation; communications and collaboration; and core IT operations including security, deployment, and systems management.

For more information about Windows Server System, go to <http://www.microsoft.com/windowsserversystem>.

Software and Services

Microsoft Speech Server 2004

Partner

Gold Systems, Inc.
www.goldsys.com
800-988-7798

© 2005 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

This case study is for informational purposes only. MICROSOFT MAKES NO WARRANTIES, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, IN THIS SUMMARY.

Microsoft, Visual Studio, the Windows logo, Windows Server, and Windows Server System are either registered trademarks or trademarks of Microsoft Corporation in the United States and/or other countries. The names of actual companies and products mentioned herein may be the trademarks of their respective owners.

Microsoft®