This article first appeared in the Summer 2015 edition of Speech Technology Magazine

[24]7

Natural Language on Steroids

By Kathy Brown
Chief Data Scientist
[24]7, Inc.

I like the title of this article because of what it suggests: You can make your natural language capabilities much more powerful. I'm going to describe how that works, but from a business perspective it means that adding cross-channel data and predictive analysis can make your natural language implementations:

Smarter
You can predict caller intent and next action based on comprehensive views of your customers purchase if they cannot find help quickly. In a minute or less, in most cases.

More engaging
You can make conversations more effective by combining natural language with prediction that has omnichannel DNA.

More productive
You can save customers time and increase self-service rates up to 25%.

If you've deployed natural language capability you know it can be difficult. Often its capabilities come up short of what vendors promote. That can be especially frustrating because the hope has been that natural language would help with the growing number of interactions that go through self-service.

It's also frustrating to deal with what seems like a paradox: You have all this data about customers, but it's not being used to improve customer service. The difficulty is making pertinent data from one channel available and immediately useful in another. Getting there requires a change in your approach. You need a way to tap customer data and orchestrate it so it's employed in real-time to provide on-target help.

"You have all this data about customers, but it's not being used to improve customer service."

Given that, how can you augment natural language so it has a significant impact on customer experience and your business goals? There are two parts to the answer. The first is to move from a single channel to an omnichannel approach incorporating data from all channels to shape how companies respond to their customers. Customer journeys usually start on the web and often move to the phone for more specific questions. It is imperative to know what customers have been doing in prior channels and apply that to their experiences. The second part of the answer is to add predictive analytics to anticipate what customers need, making it easier for them to complete their tasks.

Let's look at two scenarios to see how "natural language on steroids" can make a difference.

In a financial institution's single-channel, natural language IVR, a customer might call and say "I have a problem with my credit card." This is a classic example of non-actionable intent—responses that are vague or ambiguous. The IVR would need more information to provide help. It also shows a basic limitation of unaugmented natural language capability: What do we do with customers who don't specify their intent? This is a big problem. Nearly 40% of situations like this fail to identify an actionable intent.[1]

So a large number of such customers resort to human-assisted service, which defeats the aim of self-service and drives up costs.

Compare that to this scenario:

A customer, Susan, calls to complain that her credit card isn't working. She checked her account balance on the website just two hours ago. In the call, she hits the natural language IVR which asks, "How may I help you today?" She says, "My card's not working." At that point, if you were to predict based on the interaction in just that one channel, you might think it's a fraud lock, a bad mag-stripe or that Susan had reached her credit limit.

But if you take data from the web channel (we know she checked her balance), her account profile (we see she has an overdue payment) and add it to what she uttered ("My card's not working") then you get a triangulation.

That prepares your IVR to help. It could, in a non-threatening, non-judgmental way tell Susan why her card is not working. Then give her the right solution, which in this case would be to get her to pay the bill, right there and then. Natural language, with its ability to capture alphanumerics easily, could make this possible.

At [24]7 this is what we have been working on: Ways to move natural language beyond a single-channel approach to an omnichannel one. We fuse it with predictive analytics to help identify intent, to understand users better and quickly get to an actionable intent. Then in a single interaction we can get a customer to a solution.

That's natural language on steroids.

[1] Source: 24/7 Customer, Inc.

USA Sales Office: 910 E. Hamilton Ave Campbell, CA 95008-0610
Global Delivery Centers: Philippines, India and Central America
Contact: Phone: +1.650.385.2247 | Email: queries@247-inc.com