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Selling the Solution, Not the Box

Posted by [Sheila McGee-Smith, McGee-Smith Analytics](#) | Feb 14, 2008

[Vocantas](#) is a five-year old Ottawa-based company that describes their business as using “advanced computer telephony and speech technologies to create IVR solutions that enable organizations to automate routine telephone communications.” Intrigued by this positioning, I arranged an interview with Vocantas CEO Gary Hannah to understand what the company actually offers.

What I learned is that Vocantas is not selling IVRs, or speech recognition licenses, or even the professional services that tie these systems together for businesses. He’s selling solutions.

I started my career at an AT&T hurtling towards divestiture and the mantra was to sell solutions, not boxes. Selling into the retail vertical, we were very big on extolling the virtues of automating Bridal Registry. Before you scoff, let me say that Lord & Taylor was the account being sold to and in 1981, this was considered leading edge technology. At the end of the day, what AT&T really wanted to sell was tie lines between and among the 40 or so Lord & Taylor locations so they could share this precious information. And it worked.

In the intervening years, I’ve seen all the enterprise communications vendors talk about selling solutions but more often than not deliver boxes. In some cases a lot of boxes.

Vocantas is different. It lists its products not as 4 port or 24 port IVRs, but with application names like CallAssure (an automated system that calls patients to ensure they have taken their medication), Utilities OnCall (a turnkey system for bill inquiry and payment) and Team OnCall (a reliable solution for delivering a single, custom message to a pre-determined list of critical team members by telephone, email, cellular SMS etc.).

Vocantas is more than just a turnkey IVR application. They have also pre-integrated the solution to work with vertical-specific software, like Cogsdale for utility billing or Standing Stone, which offers software for chronic disease management. Gary Hannah reports that these integrations are often based on web services.

That said, when Vocantas walks into a prospect they’re not talking about web services or SOA or vXML design tools. They’re talking about a solution, like automating bill payment for an energy company. While SOA and vXML is probably the right answer for the multi-million dollar implementation of a huge financial services firm with an IT staff of 300, the solution approach seems to be working for Vocantas, whose target customers don’t have these assets. And it may be the key to taking speech automation to a broader market.

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##### Bruce H

commented on Feb 20, 2008 12:50:44 PM

Gary's also the president of Pronexus, a .Net based IVR software company - so he's involved on both sides. But I do agree, many vendors talk about solutions, and sell boxes. I'd like to think more companies will start selling

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