

VIRTUAL CALL CENTRES

11/9/2007

A Solution for NIPO Software CATI Users

Why implement virtual call centre solutions? What types of solution are there? What issues should be considered?

Virtual Call Centres

A SOLUTION FOR NIPO SOFTWARE CATI USERS

ABOUT INVADE

InVADE International is NIPO Software's largest dialler partner. We have provided sophisticated CATI solutions to market research clients worldwide, including North America, Asia, the Middle East and throughout Europe. In 1999 we worked with NIPO Software to produce the first integrated dialler solution for NIPO CATI clients. And in early 2007, InVADE collaborated with NIPO Software to provide a 'virtual call centre' solution.

WHY VIRTUAL CALL CENTRES

In a large and growing CATI operation, it can be difficult to recruit sufficient qualified staff, in single location. This is a common problem in a large city where floor rents are high: multiple smaller offices closer to your potential employees are an attractive proposition.

There is also an increase in regional or cross-border research, which requires more skilled interviewers than are easily available in a single country.

However setting up separate field offices across a city, country or internationally is an expensive investment, particularly, for a project with a finite duration.

'Virtual Call Centre' solutions are designed to relieve this problem. They reduce set-up costs and therefore help you expand your business flexibly and with less investment risk. There are 2 topologies, to consider. In reality these can be combined to suit your business requirements.

- Distributed-Dialler solution
- A Single-Dialler solution

DISTRIBUTED-DIALLER SOLUTION

This architecture enables a single NIPO CATI to share a single survey across multiple diallers. There are many advantages:

Cost control: Your CATI system and all CATI expertise can remain concentrated in a single location. This reduces equipment and management costs of the remote office.

Telecom Cost: Local field offices bring interviewers and interviewees closer together which reduces telecom costs. This is particularly the case, when dialling internationally.

It is a common disadvantage of simple 'multi-dialler' configuration that interviewing resources are sometimes wasted. For example running a survey across 2 sites, it is possible that the site A exhausted allocated sample before site B. The interviewers at site A may sit without work. However a true distributed dialler solution avoids this, and provides the following additional benefits:

Ease of operation: Each dialler works autonomously with the central CATI Master to request and process call requests. A survey need not be split, manually, between diallers / locations.

Load balancing: Survey records are shared dynamically between diallers so no dialler will run out of sample until the survey is finished. The result is less interviewer idle time, and faster completion of surveys. You can work with several offices as if the interviewers were located on the same floor.

Resiliency: If a site or connection to that site fails, then work can continue automatically at remaining dialler sites.

SINGLE-DIALLER CONFIGURATION

Instead of multiple diallers, this configuration uses a single dialler controlled by multiple CATIs.

The advantage is economies of scale associated with a large single dialler compared to multiple local diallers. These savings include: Cost of hosting a single dialler, technical support, physical facilities.

Another advantage is improved dialler utilisation. Dialler usage is variable, and therefore licenses are unused for a proportion of time. Aggregating the work of many CATI centres on a single dialler, improves utilization, because it decreases the likelihood that a dialler license will remain idle.

On the other hand, using a single dialler can increase the distance a telephone call travels. As a result, all other things being equal your telecom costs will rise. Therefore this solution works best in regions with low public network charges.

You can also reduce your telecom cost if you rent a 'private network' in order to carry the call instead of on traditional metered circuits (also known as the 'Public Switched Telephone Network'). In these circumstances the call will travel across the private

network, to the 'point of presence' closest to the respondent, before 'breaking out' to the public network. The 'point of presence' need not be an InVADE dialler.

THE IMPACT OF VOIP

VoIP (Voce over Internet Protocol) is often considered during discussion of Virtual Call Centres because IP (Internet Protocol) is a great way to create 'private networks'. In so far, as VoIP gateways and VoIP clients are increasingly cheap and standardized, this enables interviewing capacity to be added quickly, with minimum incremental investment. So if you can rent IP circuits of sufficient speed, quality and low price, the distance between interviewers / respondents and the dialler can increase. It may increase to the extent that you can access far lower interviewing cost base, or reach across different timezones so that your dialler is in use when otherwise it would be idle. At the extreme VoIP calls can travel across the Internet, which is free of charge, although it is very difficult to achieve appropriate and consistent level of quality. Please see separate article for discussion on VoIP.

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Implementing 'virtual call centre' solutions on a large scale implies a considerable change to your organisation and internal process. InVADE customers will be comforted to know, that expanding their existing diallers to support this new feature is a simple remote upgrade.

SUMMARY

Virtual Call Centres is a general term, which is often used to cover different implementation scenarios. However, it is possible to look at each case separately and on this basis build a sound business case, which will reflect your specific circumstances.