

experience · security · efficiency™

TAXI INDUSTRY EMBRACES SPEECH RECOGNITION TO DELIVER INCREASED SERVICE TO PATRONS

VECAB® AUTOMATES OVER 1.4 MILLION BOOKINGS FOR AUCKLAND CO-OP TAXIS

Formed in 1947, Auckland Co-op Taxis (ACT) is New Zealand's leading taxi company in terms of computer technology, market share and customer service. ACT is Auckland's largest taxi company with 700 fleet vehicles, employing 75 staff directly and 1,100 drivers. ACT's taxis carry seven million passengers annually.

DRIVING FAST AND HARD AS MARKET LEADER

Prior to implementing VeCab, ACT depended on a centralised call handling system linked to its existing Caller Line Identification (CLI) 'push button' system. The call handling costs per booking were becoming prohibitive and there were limitations with the existing Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system.

Needing to remove telephone queues, provide 'pick up address' confirmation and improve service to 'bureau' clients, ACT selected NLSR (natural language speech recognition) technology as the answer to increasing customer service whilst containing their costs. Salmat VeCommerce was chosen because of its proven taxi booking solution - VeCab.

"We take pride in our leadership position within this industry and are keenly aware that to sustain that position we need to be innovative in our approach to servicing our customers," said Tim Jago, Chief Executive Officer of Auckland Co-op Taxis.

THE TECHNOLOGY BEHIND "YOUR TAXI AWAITS"

Building on the initial success of its engagement with VeCab enables taxi patrons to simply talk directly to the taxi dispatch computer using any telephone to carry out their booking requests. Customers don't have to struggle with confusing push button menus, because the solution 'understands' the verbal request from the customer's normal speech.

The VeCab automated booking system offers customers many benefits including no waiting in phone queues to book a taxi, accurate entry of booking requests, 24 x 7 availability and an 'automated operator' that is always happy and polite. For ACT, the system has reduced callhandling costs by over 80 per cent, increased the ability to handle busy periods more effectively and reduced the need for complex staff rostering.

Salmat VeCommerce developed a special interface to ACT's Raywood taxi booking host and their Lucent telephone system via a number of digital interfaces. The hardware platform supporting the VeCab solution consists of dual DL380 Compaq servers, which run the VeCab application software and the Nuance voice recognition engine.

Aculab's Prosody 2 telephony cards interface to the Lucent telephone system and support the underlying Text-To-Speech (TTS) engine. VeCab was developed within Salmat VeCommerce's Solutions Delivery Architecture (VeSDA), which is flexible and scalable allowing for growth in the number of telephone lines being used to take incoming calls.



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FIRST CAB OFF THE RANK - INDUSTRY INNOVATION

New Zealand's first voice enabled ecommerce solution is also a world first because of some specialist 'middleware' developed by Salmat VeCommerce. ACT required the pick up address to be played back to and confirmed by the caller.

Traditionally this would have meant that every street and suburb name had to be 'pre-recorded' in order to be played back by the system - an expensive and time-consuming process.

Text-To-Speech is a technology that allows a synthesised voice to read back text that is stored on a computer. For ACT this meant that their customer 'template' could provide the text to be 'spoken'. However, Maori pronunciation is very different to how it is written - e.g. the city of Whangarei is pronounced 'Fongaray'.

Salmat VeCommerce developed a software application that interprets Maori and other unique names correctly. The software contains specialist grammar rules to identify and correctly pronounce Maori phrases.

NO MORE RED LIGHTS FOR CUSTOMERS OR ACT

Completed within just six weeks, phase one of the project introduced the Maori TTS-based 'pick up address' confirmation and CTI-enabled (Computer Telephony Intergration) screen pops up to ACT operators.

Phases now deployed include the capability to make immediate or advanced bookings, request special vehicle types (e.g. wagons or maxi taxis), make bookings for more than four passengers and support for call-backs where the system recognises that a caller may be ringing back inquiring about the location of their booked taxi with their call being passed straight through to a live operator.

"This is a real future proof investment which has given us a market edge in both technology and industry leadership," said Jago. "It has also resulted in a significant cost reduction for each booking as well as consistent customer service which is much sought after."

AUCKLAND CO-OP TAXIS WILL NOT BE PUT ON HOLD

The significant competitive advantage achieved through implementing VeCab consists of all 'template' calls answered within three seconds, no queuing for callers placing their bookings and no 'lost business' from abandoned calls.

"Our customers have the added security that we

really do know where they are with VeCab. With the touch-tone system there was always some doubt as to how the system knew where to send the car. The NLSR system also allows us to better service supermarket and hospital 'free phones' that do not have key pads," said Jago.

The company is now able to expand its booking capabilities without increasing labour resources - ACT also provides a taxi booking bureau solution to seven other taxi companies throughout New Zealand.

VeCab now handles approximately 40% of all bookings for ACT.

"VeCab is providing us with the technology platform to position ACT, in the eyes of the customer, as offering consistently superior customer service," Jago concluded.

ABOUT SALMAT VECOMMERCE

Salmat VeCommerce has developed voice self-service solutions since 1998 and today is one of the most experienced and successful application developers and systems integrators in the industry focusing on automated and scalable voice enabled caller identification and verification (ID&V) solutions.

Salmat VeCommerce assists organisations deliver exceptional customer interactions. This is achieved through a detailed analysis of existing customer processes and the development and provision of applications that utilise speech recognition, voice biometrics and other related interaction technologies.

The organisation has worked with its customers to deliver business benefit driven industry innovations including, the world's first commercial natural language wagering solution, the first voice biometric solution for the insurance industry, the first natural language call routing solution for the financial services industry and the first voice self-service real-time credit card bill payment system.

Over 60 customers globally, including: NAB, Suncorp, Telstra, Westpac, Link Market Services, ahm, Pizza Hut, Ticketek, Child Support Agency, TelstraClear, Standard Life, Australian Hearing, New Zealand's Ministry of Social Development and Inland Revenue Department and Tabcorp.

Salmat VeCommerce is a sponsor of the Voice Leadership Group, an industry association whose members are organisations that have deployed, or plan to deploy, voice self-service or speaker verification solutions.

Salmat VeCommerce is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Salmat and has offices in Australia, New Zealand, the UK and US.

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