



# From the RX pad of the IVR Doctors

Specializing in  
Automated Phone System  
Diagnostics & Optimization



## What about speech (recognition)?

Probably the #1 question we get asked is -- well, the headline above says it all. The short answer includes a few key points:

- Speech recognition is still in its 'infancy,' though **it has made tremendous strides in recent years**, and has been around for almost 20 years in some form or another.
- Despite what speech vendors might tell you, **"press or say" is the evolving consumer-driven best-in-class standard**. (Speech vendors sell speech **systems**, not full-fledged customer focused **solutions**.)
- Depending on your industry, **speech may involve significant risk** -- a gas or electric company cannot afford even a single failure for a GAS LEAK or WIRE DOWN call.
- Speech recognition systems still have issues**. If you don't believe us, just have us play "Amtrak Julie" for you some time -- after four increasingly annoying tries, "Julie" finally gets "San Francisco, California" (after having confirmed prior "Got it" responses with Los Angeles Union Station, among others) -- all done in a recording studio with no ambient noise. See transcript in the box to the right.
- Speech offers some significant benefits**. First, **in tandem with touchtone, it offers choice**, which is in synch with the big macro trend -- callers want to determine which modality, speech or touchtone -- to use at every prompt throughout the system. One client with a speech only system for five years, and whose president said "Take it out" after receiving one too many complaints, did a "Wizard of Oz" usability test (see box below) and found that callers liked "press or say." After the prompts were changed, callers switched modalities seamlessly and interchangeably during calls, based on whichever modality was easiest in the moment (e.g., speaking when on a mobile phone while driving; or pressing a response they didn't want to be overheard: PAYMENT ARRANGEMENTS or Social Security Numbers or PINs; the actual split was 60% touchtone - 40% speech). Next, **speech offers the potential for level-compression**. That is, if the caller knows key phrases (e.g., BALANCE, LAST PAYMENT, PAY-BY-PHONE, DUPLICATE BILL), they can jump levels and go right to the application. Truly a win-win for the caller and the company!

### Amtrak's "Julie" -- "Got it!"

We called Amtrak's speech system\* to book a trip and were asked only for the departing CITY. We said "Portland" and got a tutorial from "Julie" -- sounding like a 2nd grade teacher -- giving us an example of "city and state" or station name (e.g., "New York, Penn Station"), then again Julie asked for the departing CITY (only) ... arghh!

**Lesson: precision of instructions matter ... the first instruction should say "city and state."**

Next, we said "San Francisco" for the arrival city -- she asked only for city again -- and got another tutorial. Okay, we gave up and said "San Francisco, California." Julie then said **"Got it!"** (with exclamation emphasis in her gleeful voice).

Later, in the re-cap, she -- it -- actually took three more tries and two more "Got it" responses -- first telling us the arrival city was "Oceanside," then "Porterville," then finally Los Angeles Union Station! None of these sound real close to San Francisco (California :-).

**Moral of the story? Don't say "Got it!" if you don't got it!**

*\*Note: This real experience was conducted in a quiet recording studio, with no ambient noise.*

## "Wizard of Oz" Usability Testing: low-cost bullet-proofing of your IVR or speech reco system

Allows for inexpensive, computer-driven "programming" of menus and call flows No need to pay a technology vendor for an expensive and untested prototype. Let us explain how to you!



Contact us to get the IVR Doctors on *your* case -- **STAT!**



Peter Brandt  
[peter@ivrdoctors.com](mailto:peter@ivrdoctors.com)  
843.849.7856

**IVR Doctors**  
[www.ivrdoctors.com](http://www.ivrdoctors.com)

Mark Camack  
[mark@ivrdoctors.com](mailto:mark@ivrdoctors.com)  
503.449.5940