



## From the RX pad of the **IVR Doctors**

Specializing in  
Automated Phone System  
Diagnostics & Optimization



### **“Press or say” is here to stay ...**

For the last five years, we've spoken and written that an inexorable trend in best-in-class automated phone system design would be driven by interchangeable “press or say” menus and call flows.

Events are proving we got it right.

Banks, now energy utilities, are abandoning speech-only (or speech-dominant) systems. Many either are moving back to touchtone - a short-sighted mistake in our view, like ‘throwing the baby out with the bath water’ - or, better yet, are moving to a customer-focused, “have it your way” interaction via “press or say” options, throughout *every menu, every option*. This leverages the strengths of both speech and touchtone, giving callers the opportunity to use the modality that suits them best for every option during their call.

While natural language speech (i.e., “How can I help you?”) may be all the rage - among speech vendors, at least (see the Apple story, below, where we report on **callers' rage**), the *consumer-driven* move to “press or say” is on! And dual modality does not mean that if callers press a response, or speak a response, that they want that modality throughout the call...this is a big mistake! Our IVR Usability Tests show that callers mix their modalities interchangeably, without even realizing it, based (intuitively) on their real time comfort level.

High-performing IVRs - including Hydro One, DTE Energy, and PPL Electric Utilities - provide choice to callers, on every option, every menu, every step. In each case, these companies moved from underperforming directed-speech systems, to “press or say” throughout, with IVR Usability Test input as the necessary proof of concept; superior operational metrics and caller satisfaction results have followed!

### **... and Apple drops the ball!**

As an Apple-based products shop and brazen apostles for the (generally) positive usability experience of Apple products - *for which they charge premium prices* - it pains us to report that their new natural language interface for “Apple Care” phone support is, well, “not salubrious” - borrowing a phrase from one of our favorite IVR Usability Test participants.

Another way to put it is - **IT'S HORRIBLE!**

The old, directed speech way:

- “**Q: What Apple product are you calling about? A: MacBook.**”

- “**Q: What program are you calling about? A: Keynote (or whatever).**”

Callers were directed to a MacBook/Keynote specialist, who then asked for the computer's serial number. Simple, elegant, always got to the right Apple Care specialist, typically well under a minute. Then along came natural language.

The “new and improved” Apple Care natural language speech system now asks for the Apple product, with a too short pause for a response, then it asks for the serial number, and finally an open-ended question as to the nature of the call.

Two problems we've encountered in several calls we've made since the launch:

- **Q: In saying the serial number, can you say “zero-four-six-A/alpha-B as in Bravo...)? A: NO!** (Even though that's how the Apple care specialists confirm it with you. And serial number pass-through does not always work!)
- The open-ended question on “*What are you calling about?*” is totally inadequate to interpret virtually *any responses* we've given it, and highlights the inadequacy of its vocabulary -- one of the real problems with open ended speech.

As a result, we've ended up experiencing the following:

- Even when the serial number protocol works, it's not passed along down the call flow in all cases, since...
- We are now **routinely transferred** once or twice as they sort out the Apple product, Apple program, and nature of our call. And in some of those transfers, our product, program and/or issue is not passed along!

We've complained to the Apple Care specialists; they admit this is a constant complaint. **So, Apple, get on it!**

**The “new and improved” Apple Care speech protocol is a mess and detracts from your overall brand image - built on user friendliness and ease of use!**



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