



Overview

Country: USA

Industry: Retail

Customer Profile

Headquartered in Atlanta, Pull-A-Part offers customers discounted auto parts from more than 10,000 vehicles that it maintains at five self-service yards in four southeastern states.

Business Situation

The Linux interactive voice response (IVR) system that Pull-A-Part used to help customers locate cars in its inventory lacked features that the company desired, was costly to install and maintain, and was often down.

Solution

With the help of technology partner Definition 6, Pull-A-Part deployed an IVR solution that uses Microsoft Windows Server 2003 and Speech Server 2004.

Benefits

- Increases system uptime to 99 percent from 85 percent.
- Improves speed of response to customer inquiries.
- Doubles customer call capacity.
- Reduces anticipated operating costs by tens of thousands of dollars a year.

Auto Parts Retailer Moves Linux-based IVR System to More Scalable Windows

“We’re getting more calls than we ever thought possible with the Speech Server System, and when people visit the stores they tell us how much they appreciate the new voice and notification features.”

Ross Kogon
Chief Operations Officer
Pull-A-Part

Pull-A-Part sells discounted used auto parts from more than 2,000 automobiles in each of the five yards that the company maintains in the southeastern United States. An important component of its business is the interactive voice response (IVR) system that customers use to find cars in the inventory. Pull-A-Part found that its Linux-based IVR system was frequently unavailable to customers, had a limited capacity to receive calls, lacked desired features, and was costly to install and support. With the help of Microsoft Gold Certified Partner Definition 6, Pull-A-Part deployed Microsoft® Speech Server 2004 on Microsoft Windows Server™ 2003. As a result, the company increased its IVR system’s uptime to 99 percent from 85 percent, doubled its capacity to receive calls, added enhanced voice recognition and callback features, and implemented a technology infrastructure that grows with the business.

Situation

Based in Atlanta, Pull-A-Part has been in the auto salvage business since 1998. The family-owned company stocks roughly 2,000 cars in each of its five 20-acre yards. Using environmentally friendly products, Pull-A-Part cleans incoming vehicles and places them on stands in rows organized according to manufacturer.

“Well, the best way to describe Pull-A-Part is that we’re the un-junkyard.” According to Ross Kogon, Chief Operations Officer of Pull-A-Part, the goal of Pull-A-Part is to revolutionize the auto salvage industry with a business model that focuses on providing exceptional customer service and discounted prices in a clean, organized setting, using methods that take full advantage of the company’s technology infrastructure.

“By using Speech Server, Pull-A-Part ensures that customer messages are immediately routed to the correct person so the company doesn’t miss sales opportunities.”

John Gillett
Technical Project Manager
Definition 6

Customer service through IVR. A key element of the customer service offered by Pull-A-Part is the company’s IVR system. In the past, Pull-A-Part dealt with such a high volume of phone calls from customers—hundreds of calls per day—that the business required two to three additional employees per location just to handle phone traffic. Upon finding that these employees answered the same questions repeatedly, Pull-A-Part began to see the potential value of an automated phone system that provided recorded answers to the most commonly asked questions. Furthermore, the company envisioned an IVR solution that could extend the product search features available on its Web page to customers who lacked Internet access.

In 1999, Pull-A-Part implemented an IVR solution running on the Linux operating system that enabled customers to use a touch-tone telephone to search the company’s inventory of cars. Following recorded prompts, customers navigated a menu to find the makes and models of cars that were currently in stock at specific store locations. If the needed parts were not in stock, the system could monitor a store’s inventory and notify the customer by phone or fax when a car of the correct make and model arrived.

Problems with the system. Within two years of using the Linux-based solution, Pull-A-Part found that it did not meet the company’s operational needs. For example, each Pull-A-Part location had to sacrifice 25 percent of its phone capacity to the IVR system. One or more phone lines were frequently down because of unrelated telephony issues, so customers were often unable to connect either to the system or to a company representative. “We estimate that 10 to 20 percent of customer calls went unanswered more than 50 percent of the time,” says Kogon.

The company also found that the Linux solution would not easily keep pace with the business’s growth. To run the software, each store had to install additional hardware that included a

server computer and wiring for the phone system. Finally, because the IVR system did not receive its inventory information from the same database that employees in each store used, customers were getting search results by phone that didn’t accurately reflect the company’s inventory.

“When we choose a technology product, we ask three things,” says Kogon. “Does it match our IT standards? Will it continue to work well when we expand our business? And finally, does it do what it’s supposed to do? From our perspective, the Linux solution was not standard enough, not scalable enough, and not functional enough.”

Solution

Pull-A-Part turned to Microsoft Gold Certified Partner Definition 6 for help with finding an alternative solution.

Pull-A-Part worked with Definition 6 to select a new IVR solution that possessed the reliability and rich feature set that Pull-A-Part desired. Following an infrastructure assessment of the Pull-A-Part network by Microsoft and Definition 6, the partner recommended Microsoft Speech Server 2004 running on the Microsoft Windows Server 2003 operating system.

Pull-A-Part recognized that Speech Server possessed the desired features: interactive price and inventory checks, outbound notification, and fax and e-mail modules. Definition 6 also showed Pull-A-Part how moving its IVR solution to Microsoft Windows Server System™ integrated server software could provide the company with the stability that it needs in a mission-critical software application. In addition, Definition 6 could administer the entire network centrally. This move would reduce the cost of support as well as the cost of future deployments at new Pull-A-Part locations.

Designing the solution. Definition 6 designed an IVR system for Pull-A-Part that takes full advantage of the features in Speech Server to better

serve the company's customers. For example, technicians configured the voice recognition feature to recognize distinctive regional dialects that residents speak in each of the four southeastern states in which Pull-A-Part has stores.

With the new solution, a customer dials a local phone number that is transferred to a toll-free number in Atlanta. Either verbally or using the phone's touch-tone keypad, the customer enters the desired automobile make, model, and year. Speech Server checks the request against the information in a Microsoft SQL Server™ 2000 database that lists the inventory of every Pull-A-Part store. A custom point-of-sale software solution at each store, created by Definition 6 using Microsoft Visual Basic® 6.0 Developer Edition, updates the database every time a part is sold or received. This ensures that the inventory information relayed by phone is always current.

The system checks the inventory for all Pull-A-Part stores in the city indicated by the local phone number that the customer called. If the car is in stock locally, the system informs the customer of its exact location in the yard. If the customer is at a Pull-A-Part store and the desired car is not in that store's inventory, the customer can enter his or her phone number into the IVR system from the store. The system will automatically notify the customer by phone, fax, or e-mail if the local store receives the make and model of desired car.

The customers who most often wish to leave voice messages for Pull-A-Part are those who have a used car that they wish to sell to a store. The system records their voice messages and saves them as audio files in the WAV format. The system then uses e-mail to send the recordings to the correct store locations.

"This is a feature that Pull-A-Part is very excited about," says John Gillett, Technical Project Manager for Definition 6. "The old voice-mail solution consisted of a recorder that was hooked up to a

normal phone line and recorded the customer's message to a tape. By using Speech Server, Pull-A-Part ensures that customer messages are immediately routed to the correct person so the company doesn't miss sales opportunities."

Deploying the solution. Definition 6 deployed the first installation of the new IVR solution at Pull-A-Part in Nashville in November 2004. Pull-A-Part employees spent the next three weeks testing the features and call capacity of the new system. When they were satisfied that all implementation issues had been identified and resolved, Definition 6 deployed the solution at the remaining Pull-A-Part stores.

Definition 6 manages and maintains the SQL Server 2000 database and the IVR solution at its central location in Atlanta, freeing Pull-A-Part to focus on its core business.

"The technology, the deployment, and the support we've received since this project began have been great," says Kogon. "The interactive voice response system is our main method of communicating with our customers, and Speech Server has proven to be a very powerful tool to interact with them."

Benefits

Since the deployment of the new IVR solution, Pull-A-Part has improved the reliability of its customer service software, increased customer call capacity, and achieved significant cost savings.

Improves reliability. The average uptime of the Linux-based IVR system was 85 percent. Since Pull-A-Part implemented Microsoft Windows Server 2003 running Speech Server 2004, the average uptime has risen to 99 percent. Pull-A-Part reports that customers have expressed satisfaction with the new system, citing their ability to connect to it 24/7. In addition, the accurate and consistent routing of voice messages means that company representatives are able to follow up on requests more quickly.

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Ross Kogon
Chief Operations Officer
Pull-A-Part

For more information

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For more information about Definition 6 products and services, call (404) 870-0323 or visit the Web site at <http://www.definition6.com>.

For more information about Pull-A-Part visit the Web site at <http://www.pullapart.com>.

For more information about Microsoft Speech Server, visit the Web site at <http://www.microsoft.com/speech>.

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Increases call capacity. By switching to Speech Server, Pull-A-Part doubled the capacity of the IVR system to receive incoming customer calls. Because customers can reach the system more easily and reliably by phone, and have more powerful features available to locate their desired car, the new solution greatly increases the company's sales opportunities.

"We're getting more calls than we ever thought possible with the Speech Server system," says Kogon. "Our customers love it."

Achieves significant cost savings. By implementing Windows Server 2003, Pull A-Part was able to replace the five Linux server computers required to run the old IVR system with one central server. The company also eliminated the additional phone lines dedicated to the IVR system at each location. This lessened the need for on-site technical support at the company's five stores and reduced telephony expenses, representing an approximate savings of \$2,400 a year per store.

Pull-A-Part saw additional savings in support costs through migrating its entire network to Windows Server System. The presence of Linux servers on the company's network required Pull-A-Part to pay approximately \$8,000 a year for specialized vendor support services to maintain the Linux operating system. Pull-A-Part no longer needs that additional support because Definition 6 administers and troubleshoots the entire Pull A-Part technology environment.

"Even with the initial licensing cost of migrating to Windows Server System, it was less expensive for Pull-A-Part to switch to a Microsoft solution. The cost of having Definition 6 administer the Windows®-based IVR system is lower than the cost Pull-A-Part was paying to maintain a Linux server," says Paul Hernacki, Vice President of Information Technology for Definition 6. "Financially and technologically, this was a win-win situation for Pull-A-Part."

Kogon says, "Overall, we anticipate savings of tens of thousands of dollars per year because of this new solution."

Microsoft Windows Server System

Microsoft Windows Server System™ integrated server infrastructure software is designed to support end-to-end solutions built on the Windows Server™ operating system. Windows Server System creates an infrastructure based on integrated innovation, Microsoft's holistic approach to building products and solutions that are intrinsically designed to work together and interact seamlessly with other data and applications across your IT environment. This helps you reduce costs of ongoing operations, deliver a more secure and reliable IT infrastructure, and drive valuable new capabilities for the future growth of your business.

For more information about Windows Server System, go to <http://www.microsoft.com/windowsserversystem>.

Software and Services

Microsoft Windows Server 2003
Microsoft Windows Server 2004 – Enterprise Edition
Microsoft Speech Server 2004
Microsoft SQL Server 2004

Partner

Definition 6