Cisco and IBM to Deliver New Speech-Enabled Self-Service Solutions

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IBM and Cisco today announced they jointly plan to deliver to contact centers speech-enabled self-service solutions that combine IBM's WebSphere Voice Server product and Cisco's Customer Voice Portal. The solutions would combine IBM's integration and application infrastructure software and speech technology with Cisco's Internet Protocol (IP) communications and focus on self-service speech applications, which together can enable easier deployment of customized speech applications that enhance the customer experience.

By using IBM WebSphere Application Server middleware, the solutions would allow contact centers to leverage open standards, including Voice XML and J2EE. These solutions enable contact centers to provide efficient and low-cost speech-enabled self-service transactions to their customers, such as transferring money from a checking account, submitting insurance claims, changing cellular phone plans, making hotel and car reservations or finding the nearest store location using speech automation -- functions that frequently required a live agent in a contact center.

IBM's Business Consulting Services has found that labor -- payroll, turnover, training and retention -- is often 75 percent of contact center costs. Self-service speech solutions can help address this by automating many customer interactions that drive labor costs, which can provide significant improvements in the cost per transaction.

Combining Cisco's Customer Voice Portal with IBM's award-winning

WebSphere® infrastructure software would also enable enterprises to incorporate speech into a range of functions. These include customer service, sales and marketing, human resources and inventory management.

Customers and employees of an enterprise can use speech to interact with automated services that seamlessly link together contact centers, Internet Protocol networks, IP communications and enterprise applications and data.

The IBM/Cisco offerings will be designed to let businesses extend enterprise-class speech self-service to remote locations across both IP and non-IP networks -- including local and branch offices. When banking customers make after-hours calls to their local branch, they won't be limited to voicemail, or be asked to call another phone number. The Cisco and IBM solutions can allow customers to use speech to interact with centralized automated applications that reflect up-to-date transactions and past history.

"Speech is an important part of a company's contact center and customer care infrastructure. By using speech within the contact center, as well as to access enterprise applications, companies are improving the customer experience while driving down costs," said Bruce Morse, IBM Vice President, Contact Center Solutions. "This is another example of IBM expanding the speech ecosystem by enabling it to work across heterogeneous environments with open standards as the common denominator. The relationship brings to the contact center rich benefits that enterprise IT has enjoyed for years: integration, analytics, collaboration, systems management, reliability and scalability."

"Cisco and IBM are raising the bar on self-service with new solutions that provide an easier, more cost-effective way for businesses to deploy speech applications enhancing automated communications," said Laurent

Philonenko, Vice President and General Manager of Cisco's Customer Contact Business Unit. "The close integration of these technologies helps companies incorporate speech into today's enterprises, ensuring the highest quality of service is delivered from any global location."

The combination of Cisco Customer Voice Portal with IBM WebSphere Voice Server for Multiplatforms provides businesses with a single integrated platform upon which to develop a new generation of speech applications. Cisco Customer Voice Portal incorporates open standards such as VoiceXML (VXML), which provides Internet tools for speech application development, and Media Resource Control Protocol (MRCP), which facilitates integration of speech recognition and text-to-speech.

New features in the IBM WebSphere Voice Server product leverage administration, installation, deployment, load balancing, fail-over and logging throughout the enterprise with WebSphere Application Server middleware. WebSphere integration and infrastructure software can help leverage existing IT investments and resources to support new business models, reach users in new ways, and integrate business processes with an enterprise-wide, flexible, service-oriented approach to application integration.

In addition to IBM's WebSphere Application Server software, customers can use WebSphere Business Integration Server, DB2 Universal Database, IBM Workplace and Tivoli Identity Manager software to enable contact center integration to back end systems as well as customer insight through data analytics.

Cisco also will support IBM's Reusable Dialog Components initiative. RDCs are an open source, Java-based set of pre-built components that aid in the rapid development of speech applications. By offering software components using standards and programming models that Java

developers are familiar with, the initiative has opened up speech development to millions of Java programmers, and speeded integration of Web and voice applications into the mainstream business infrastructure. IBM contributed RDCs to the Apache Software Foundation last year.

Global availability of the joint Cisco and IBM solutions is planned for the second quarter of 2005.