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Traffic Ticket IVR
By Ellen Muraskin, Computer Telephony Magazine, July 2000

The Problem:
High call volumes in LA Traffic Court.

The Pieces:
Sonant Corporation's (San Diego, CA - 858-623-8180, w w w .sonant.com) ClientCall CourtTalk IVR/ACD Norstar hybrid key/PBX system IVR servers housing: Dialogic D/480SC 48-port voice cards w ith netw ork interface, Dialogic D/241SC netw ork interface cards ACD/Payment Server Window s NT

The Plot:
The Los Angeles Municipal Court's 15-station call center handles calls from LA residents w ho've received traffic tickets. Until November 1998, they w ere sw amped w ith queues grow ing 50 calls deep, abandons, and busies. That w as just to answ er the LAPD's ticketed callers. When the center's job w as expanded to include citations from the county highw ay patrol and other agencies as w ell, they realized that their small IVR system had reached the breaking point. "It w ould take tw o to three days to get through," says Bernadette Duncan, Division Chief, Metropolitan Branch Court.
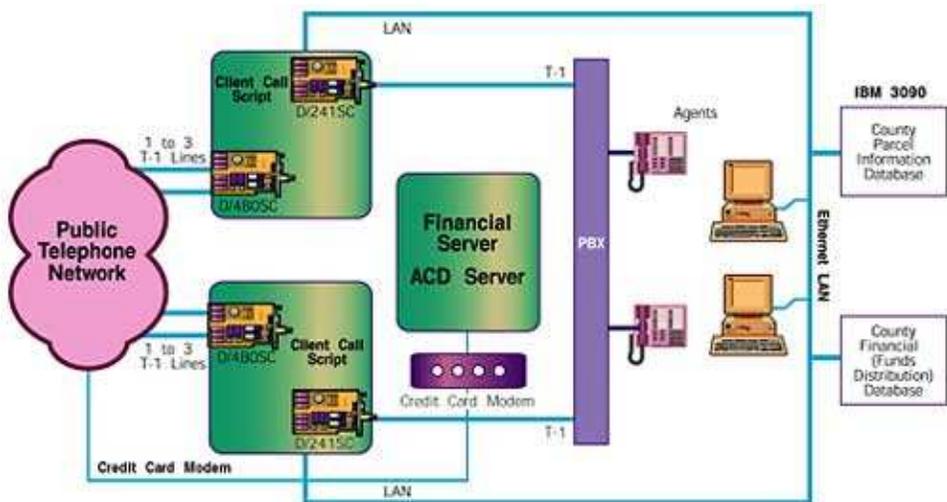
Sonant's CourtTalk IVR/ACD for Los Angeles Municiple Court reduced call hold times in their call center 550%. It (and its website equivalent) also automated up to $800,000 per month in credit card payments of fines.

The pre-existing IVR had automated a small portion of ticket handling: only the numerically-coded traffic tickets of the LAPD. Alphanumerically coded tickets had to be handled by live operators. The old system w as also the product of three different vendors: Sonant for IVR, PacBell for Centrex-based ACD, and Microlog for auto attendant. "They all w orked independently," recalls Duncan.

When the time came to upgrade, the LAMC w ent w ith Sonant, for their preexisting familiarity w ith the center's requirements and their previous aw ard through competitive bid. Sonant supplied the new er auto attendant, expanded the IVR, the credit-card payment processing engine to go w ith it, and built an integrated ACD. They replaced agent dumb terminals w ith Window s PCs, and put a Norstar hybrid phone system for bare-bones sw itching behind their ACD and IVR servers. "That ended the [multi-vendor] finger pointing," says Duncan.

That also started a revenue gush, because the system so markedly increased LAMC's capacity to handle call volume. It automated a much larger proportion of calls, spread that call load around the clock, reduced hold times over 550%, virtually eliminated busies, and screen-popped caller records and ACD info on calls that did go to live operators.

"The first day w e turned the sw itch on this system, w e got $3,000 in payments," Duncan says. "Under the old

system, we collected $110,000 in payments per month. Under the new system, we now collect $160,000 to $200,000 per week." Just taking the friction out of ticket payment has lowered the number of arrest and bench warrants the court has had to issue for non-payers.

Callers enter citation numbers and birthdates. Sonant's system fetches caller history and applies eligibility rules to administer automatable penalties: Someone who hasn't had a citation in over year, for example, might satisfy his penalty by signing up (using IVR registration) for traffic school. The system also lets callers automatically set arraignment dates. If they want to contest tickets (if they qualify), they can order forms for "trial-by-declaration," on which they can write up and submit their version of events. Sonant has added credit-card payment to LAMC's Web site as well, accessing the same financial database as the IVR.

Two voice servers with two incoming T-1s apiece currently run this NT system, for a total of 96 ports. Mirrored IVR runs in both VRUs using Sonant's ClientCall script, consulting business rules, back end databases, as well as the separate ACD and payment-processing server. Where calls must follow to a live agent, the ACD determines available agents, Client Call fetches the target agent's DID, and a D/241SC on the back end of the VRU uses the DID to forward the call through the Norstar.

Client Call also has the citation number to send over LAN to the host database. In this way, caller-entered data completely circumvents the switch; no PBX integration is necessary. "Our only requirement of the PBX is that it be programmed to give our ACD a dedicated line appearance at each agent's phone set," says Murray Judy, Sonant's VP, Engineering, so that the ACD knows who is logged on and available. Lernout & Hauspie text-to-speech is used to read back addresses for confirmation.

Agent PCs are simultaneously logged onto two sessions: ClientCall's own agent client and a terminal emulation of a CICS screen running off LAMC's IBM 390. This accesses the traffic violation database.

Knowledge is power: The Sonant client gives agents new found leverage in dealing with clients by telling them how long they've really been waiting in queue, and why their call was forwarded. Murray Judy says that the effect on CSR morale was dramatic: "People who'd left the call center now wanted to come back." Agents can now also redirect callers back into the automated system, popping them back right where they left off, or any other place in the IVR, using a drop-down menu of reentry points. Calls can also be transferred to extensions both within and outside the ACD.

Completion of the next upgrade to LAMC's system will bring another T-1 onboard, for a total capacity of 144 ports. The new ports will support Los Angeles County's consolidation from 23 separate municipal courts to reorganization as one Superior Court, and an upcoming centralization of one call center for all traffic court calls. It's also supporting the increased ticketing (and revenue stream) that's followed LA's institution of Photo Enforcement: those cameras mounted at intersection that catch and photograph drivers running red lights. Those ticket recipients have a separate menu item on LAMC's IVR.

Sonant, for its part, has leveraged its success with Los Angeles to market the solution vertically, as ClientCall CourtTalk. Aimed at a wider range of court applications, 16 have been sold to date.

About Sonant
Sonant Corporation, a privately-held technology company based in San Diego, provides customized phone- and Web-based contact and information management systems for a wide range of industries and government organizations. ClientCall eCenter™ is the foundation platform of Sonant's family of contact center and electronic payment automation products. The products and services include such contact center automation features as Automatic Contact Distribution (ACD), Automated Speech Recognition (ASR), Interactive Voice Response (IVR), electronic payment by phone and Internet, Computer Telephony Integration (CTI), and fax-back. ClientCall eCenter™ is designed to enhance an organization's customer service and reduce operating costs.

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