



When to Use Natural Language (NL) – and When to Avoid It

Used strategically, NL is a major tool in one's IVR design arsenal that can decrease call duration, improve call containment and more accurately route customers. Conversely, it can be a waste of company time and energy without proper forethought.



Implementing NL is a smart choice when:

- Capturing intent is crucial in getting the caller to the appropriate agent. This is especially relevant when there are several specialized agent line groups.
- The routing strategy is complex. The more skilled and specialized the agents in the contact center are, the more viable NL becomes.
- There are a vast number of reasons a customer could be calling, making a touch-tone menu cumbersome. A call to an airline, for example, could be about anything from lost luggage to bonus miles information. If a dualtone multifrequency (DTMF) IVR can't create a menu without exceeding cognitive load, NL becomes a practical solution.

Companies should avoid NL when:

- The only goal is to “wow” the caller. Speech science should not be used as a sales tool or gimmick; it's a strategic investment.
- The scope of the application is minimal. NL should not be used when the number of options in a menu are so few that a caller can process them without experiencing cognitive overload.
- Research hasn't been conducted yet. NL should not be used when a contact center is unsure of how to measure the potential success and justify the investment. Call volume, agent costs and increased automation should be considered. All must be identified and measured to determine whether the benefits will outweigh the costs of deployment and maintenance.
- Resources are lacking. For example, NL should not be used in one part of the IVR if there is a lack of a roadmap to redesign other applications to support it and create a consistent customer experience.
- Routing is simple. NL should not be used when there are sparse self-service opportunities or transferring to a contact center is inevitable.
- Calls are handled by universal agents. If agents are trained to handle every type of call, the need for highly specialized agents is eliminated and NL may not be cost-effective.
- Directed dialog or DTMF could adequately address the scenario.

Effective Natural Language takes time, money and ongoing optimization.
[Click here](#) to download a guide to learn about the speech application lifecycle.