VOICE SITES:
RETURN OF THE "VOICE WEB"?

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Is it all about smartphones and touch screens?

- Touch screens aren't always convenient to use
  - Tellme/Microsoft survey: Other than driving, respondents would feel comfortable using voice to perform tasks on their smartphones while walking (93%), exercising (92%), and shopping or running errands (87%).

All phones have a voice channel

- Smartphones still a minority of sales by volume, even in US
  - Voice is the major channel in developing countries

Voice calls are getting to be cheaper or "free" in unlimited plans, like web access

- And data access may be charged based on usage
- Free directory assistance is popular

"Conversational Marketing"

- NBC engaged Call Genie, to host a telephone adjunct to their popular TV game show "Deal or No Deal"
  - Deal Mania sweepstakes toll-free number
  - Data is captured for future promotions and "push" marketing
- "The basic change is that we treat the voice application as a speech understanding problem, picking meaning out of what the caller says, not as a dialog design problem. It sounds subtle, but it is a profound shift…This is an area where voice has a real advantage over text-based search. When a user keys in a search on Google, they expect to see matching results. Maybe the results are not what they wanted, so they key in a different search term, and it could take a few tries to get what they want – if they don't give up. With speech, it is natural to engage the caller, asking them to clarify what they are looking for. It is a different paradigm, a more natural user experience that potentially gives faster and more accurate results."
  - Michael Durance, Call Genie CEO, October 2009 interview in *Speech Strategy News*)

Advertising budgets

- Advertising budgets for 2007 (Schonfeld & Associates)
  - Food companies $27.2 Billion
  - Pharmaceutical $24 Billion
  - Telecommunications $24.2 Billion
  - Retail stores $12.2 Billion
  - Automotive $30.6 Billion

What about call centers?

- Shouldn't they be treated more like web sites?
  - Speech automation can make this economical
  - Engage the caller who volunteers to talk to you
    - Our "attention deficit" culture
- "Voice Sites"!

Is this too much of a technical challenge?

- Over-structured classical "menus" are unlikely to create a voice-site experience
- "Natural-language" speech recognition using Statistical Language Models is one option
  - But not a requirement
- Creatively designed voice interactions using grammar-driven approaches can work
  - Good web sites require good design, and so do good voice sites
- Tools for both types are available that let one work from examples of what callers say

So—Where's the meat?

- Evolution of speech in call centers driven by touch-tone history and agent focus
- Distrust of speech technology?
- Lack of experience in creating "conversational marketing" sites?
- A few key successes needed to create enthusiasm?