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CAT in 2008:
Transition Without Disruption

In a year that has the scent of recession, enterprise investment in Conversational Access Technologies (CAT) will be more closely linked to business objectives than ever. This puts a premium on packaging and marketing efforts that improve users' experience by leveraging existing self-service resources and fostering strong relationships with integrators, developers and managed service providers.

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Key Findings:

It's all about the budget now! Speech processing technology is often overlooked as IT departments feel pressure, from both inside and out, to address larger business issues and shifting architectures:

- **Opportunities abound at the "edges"** – IVRs have long been part of "front door" technologies (ACDs, auto-attendants) and will remain so. In the mobile world, speech recognition and text-to-speech rendering is presented as software embedded into mobile devices.
- **Lines blur between modalities** – "Multimodal" has come to mean speech-in/visual back, but humans have entered the application workflow to support applications that produce results.
- **Speech-enabled search finds a role** – Both self-service and mobile contexts remove the emphasis from search and place it squarely on results. Yet even speech-enabling the search-box is a simple and effective example of shallow integration that will bring new revenues and profits in 2008.
- **Focus on "user experience" getting diffused** – For enterprise implementations, user experience is enhanced at the "front-door" by deeper integration with CRM, business intelligence and analytics. Mobile applications put spotlight on "open" initiatives.
- **Hosting is an integration point** – Learn from Google! Best case scenario: Hosted service providers fulfill the promise of "speech as a service" by closely linking CTI, call routing and business logic with high levels of reliability and advanced technology. In 2008 it is being framed as part projects aimed at "virtualization" or "migration to IP."
- **Unified Communications crowding out customer care** – Microsoft may be the cautionary tale as Speech Server applications as an IVR disappears under a morass of collaboration and presence infrastructure.
- **Hardware has fulfilled the multi-protocol promise** – The Dialogic brand has returned and integrated high-density boards, digital and analog media gateways, media servers. Others are doing the same.
- **Mobility and multiple applications require better security** – Expect start-ups and old-guard companies to build out authentication and encryption solutions.
- **Solutions must make the most of masking complexities** – Prospective implementers are still confronted with too many choices and a plethora of solutions with options that include premises-based, hosted, integrated or point.
- **Challenges afoot in 2008** – Fear of recession, uncertainty about IT architectures, confusion surrounding mobility and IP-telephony could keep speech technologies on the back burner in the data center.

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