



870,000 WhatsApp Interactions and 150,000 Calls in 48 hours: How Sartz Solutions Managed South Africa's National Power Utility's Communication Surge

Executive Summary

The National Power Utility, the leading electricity provider in South Africa, faced a critical need for a scalable, stable, and rapid-response communication solution to manage a critical, time dependent technology upgrade with their customers – without which would leave customers without access to electricity. Despite the communication plan advising customers months in advance, the due date for the customer-initiated update arrived with limited customer adoption. The result was call volumes reaching unprecedented levels at which the traditional systems were unable to cope with the demand.

As a long-standing platform provider to the Utility, Sartz Solutions working in tandem with our partner - Interscope Technologies - was able to respond in less than 48 hours. Sartz Solutions enhanced the current omnichannel communication solution, fully integrating IVR and WhatsApp Bots. Starting on a Thursday with scoping of the IVR development required, the additional requirements to the system went live by Friday afternoon, handling over 150,000 calls over the weekend. By Sunday, a temporary WhatsApp Bot was deployed, processing 870,000 interactions within 24 hours.

Key results included the rapid deployment of solutions, the ability to scale to 1200 concurrent calls, and a transformative shift in customer engagement during one of the busiest weekends experienced by the Utility's contact centres. This effort highlighted Sartz Solutions' ability to deliver efficient scalability, stability, and seamless crisis management across multiple communication channels.

The Client

National Power Utility

South Africa's leading electricity utility provider, is responsible for generating, transmitting, and distributing electricity to millions of households, businesses, and industries across the country. As a cornerstone of South Africa's infrastructure, the Utility plays a critical role in supporting economic activities and powering the daily lives of its citizens.

The Power of Trusted Partnerships

As the platform solution underpinning **Interscope Technologies** provision of communication solutions to the Utility, Smartz Solutions worked in collaboration with Interscope Technologies to highlight the agility and scalability of Smartz Solutions omnichannel communication platform.

During the crisis period, Smartz Solutions brought their experience and expertise to the table with the rapid deployment of IVR and WhatsApp Bot solutions. This enabled the Utility to efficiently manage the crisis and to ensure operational stability supported by a responsive multi-channel communication service experience for its customers.

The Challenge

Managing Crisis Communication Under Extreme Pressure

The Utility faced a dual challenge: maintaining operational stability during a crisis and meeting the soaring demand for customer communication due to the upgrade to all the Utility's prepaid meters.

Interscope Technologies and Smartz Solutions had a single goal: to show how the Smartz Solutions' omnichannel communication platform could handle unprecedented levels of customer demand quickly.



Smartz Solutions was tasked with:

- Rapidly upscaling the current solution to manage high call volumes.
- Enhance the current IVR to cater for the additional requirements needed by the Utility.
- Introducing new communication channels, such as WhatsApp Bots, to reduce pressure on the IVR system.
- Ensuring system stability and seamless operation under peak loads.
- Delivering these solutions in record time to mitigate the immediate impact of the crisis.

The Solution

A Rapidly Deployed, Scalable Omnichannel Communication Strategy

Smartz Solutions implemented a two-pronged approach, leveraging the current **IVR (Interactive Voice Response)** in place and introducing a **WhatsApp Bot** to add an additional channel to manage surges in customer communication. This agile, scalable strategy allowed the Utility to handle an unprecedented volume of interactions while maintaining system stability and operational efficiency.

Step-by-Step Deployment Timeline

Thursday	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Smartz Solutions and Interscope Technologies scoped the IVR solution within hours.• Development began immediately, with Smartz engineers working overnight to create a tailored solution.
Friday	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• By 10h00, the IVR system was ready for deployment.• Internal QA was completed by 13h00, ensuring the system met the Utility's rigorous standards.• The enhanced IVR went live that evening, handling 900 concurrent calls at maximum capacity, providing immediate relief to overwhelmed contact centres.
Saturday	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• With call volumes continuing to climb, Smartz Solutions collaborated with the Utility and another partner to reconfigure overflow routing via another route.• By 04h00, the capacity had been doubled, adding additional channels to support a total of 1200 concurrent calls.
Sunday	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Recognising the need for further scalability, Smartz Solutions proposed and developed a WhatsApp Bot.• The Bot was scoped, coded, tested, and launched within hours, going live by 13h00.• Within 24 hours, the WhatsApp Bot handled 870,000 interactions, far exceeding the capacity of the IVR system.

Key Features of the Solution

IVR System

- Scaled rapidly to manage 150,000 calls over the weekend.
- Provided stability and efficiency under peak loads, showcasing the resilience of Smartz Solutions' technology.

WhatsApp Bot

- Handled 970,000 interactions before transitioning to a long-term solution.
- Offered a faster, more convenient customer experience, leveraging WhatsApp's widespread adoption in South Africa.
- Reduced pressure on the IVR system, allowing for balanced resource allocation.

Omnichannel Integration

Smartz Solutions' ability to integrate multiple communication channels demonstrated the flexibility and scalability of its platform. The solution enabled the Utility to start with enhancing IVR and seamlessly transition to WhatsApp, showcasing the value of an omnichannel approach in managing crises.



Results

Unprecedented Scalability and Efficiency

Smartz Solutions' implementation of IVR and WhatsApp Bot technology enabled the Utility to manage crisis communication at an extraordinary scale, providing immediate and tangible benefits to both the organisation and its customers.

Key Metrics and Outcomes

IVR Performance

- Handled **150,000 calls** over a single weekend.
- Scaled from an initial capacity of **600 concurrent calls** to 1200 concurrent calls within 48 hours.
- Delivered stable and reliable service during peak demand, minimising disruptions and improving customer experience.

WhatsApp Bot Impact

- Managed **870,000 interactions in just 24 hours**, outpacing the IVR system.
- Reduced average handling times by providing a faster, more intuitive alternative for customers to report outages and receive updates.
- Proved to be a customer-friendly, highly efficient solution that resonated with the South African market's familiarity with WhatsApp.

Enhanced Customer Experience

- Customers benefited from reduced wait times and greater convenience, as they could choose their preferred communication channel.

- The proactive integration of WhatsApp Bots ensured that customer needs were met swiftly and effectively, even during peak crises.

Operational Improvements

- The Utility's contact centres achieved significant efficiencies, balancing resources between IVR and WhatsApp channels.
- Smartz Solutions demonstrated the ability to deploy scalable solutions in **hours, not weeks or months**, setting a new standard for crisis management in contact centres.

Strategic Benefits

Crisis Management

The rapid deployment of omnichannel solutions allowed the Utility to handle one of the largest communication surges in its history without compromising service quality.

Flexibility

The ability to integrate new channels seamlessly (e.g., transitioning from IVR to WhatsApp) showcased the adaptability of Smartz Solutions' platform.

Cost Efficiency

While IVR offers a more budget-friendly solution for high call volumes, WhatsApp Bots delivers greater efficiency for handling large-scale customer interactions, demonstrating the value of a balanced omnichannel approach.

Key Takeaways/Learnings

1. Crisis Management Requires Agility and Scalability

The Utility's ability to handle over a million customer interactions in just a few days underscores the importance of agile and scalable communication solutions. Smartz Solutions demonstrated that rapid deployment and adaptability are critical to managing high-pressure situations effectively.

2. Omnichannel Integration is Essential

The seamless transition from IVR to WhatsApp Bots highlights the value of a truly omnichannel approach. Customers were given the flexibility to engage through their preferred channels, resulting in faster resolutions and improved satisfaction.

3. The Power of WhatsApp in the South African Market

South African customers are highly familiar with WhatsApp, making it a natural choice for large-scale engagement. The WhatsApp Bot proved faster, more convenient, and capable of handling higher volumes compared to traditional IVR, showing that the market is ready for more innovative communication solutions.

4. Stability and Speed are Non-Negotiable

Smartz Solutions' ability to scale the Utility's capacity from 900 to 1,200 concurrent calls and deploy a fully functional WhatsApp Bot within hours highlights the importance of a stable, quick-to-deploy platform during crises.

5. Cost Efficiency Must Balance with Innovation

While IVR remains a cost-effective solution, WhatsApp Bots demonstrated superior efficiency and customer satisfaction, particularly during peak loads. Businesses must evaluate their specific needs and budgets to strike the right balance between cost and innovation.

6. Collaboration Drives Success

The partnership between the Utility, Interscope Technologies, and Smartz Solutions showcases the power of collaboration in achieving remarkable results. By aligning goals and leveraging each partner's strengths, the team delivered a solution that exceeded expectations in record time.

7. Lessons for the Industry

This case study demonstrates that:

- Ensure you have the right partners and solutions in place.
- Crisis communication requires both flexibility and foresight.
- Omnichannel solutions can transform customer engagement, even in the most challenging scenarios.
- Rapid deployment and scalability are game changers in the evolving contact centre landscape.

About Smartz Solutions

Smarz Solutions is a leading contact centre technology provider offering AI-driven, omnichannel, and cloud-agnostic platforms designed for modern customer engagement. With a focus on cost-effectiveness, flexibility, and innovation, Smartz Solutions enables businesses to transition from legacy, restrictive systems to future-ready platforms that drive superior customer and employee experiences.



"We are not offering products. We offer solutions. Through the Smartz Solutions' suite we work with you to accelerate your customer and employee experiences, keeping you at the forefront of your industry."

James Guthrie, Founder Smartz Solutions

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