

Call centre users 'lose patience'

Customers trying to get through to call centres are getting impatient and quicker to hang up, a survey suggests.

Once past the welcome message, callers on average hang up after just 65 seconds of listening to canned music. The drop in patience comes as the number of calls to call centres is growing at a rate of 20% every year. "Customers are getting used to the idea of an 'always available' society," says Cara Diemont of IT firm Dimension Data, which commissioned the survey. However, call centres also saw a sharp increase of customers simply abandoning calls, she says, from just over 5% in 2003 to a record 13.3% during last year. When automated phone message systems are taken out of the equation, where customers have to pick their way through multiple options and messages, the number of abandoned calls is even higher - a sixth of all callers give up rather than wait. One possible reason for the lack in patience, Ms Diemont says, is the fact that more customers are calling 'on the move' using their mobile phones.

The surge in customers trying to get through to call centres is also a reflection of the centres' growing range of tasks. "Once a call centre may have looked after mortgages, now its agents may also be responsible for credit cards, insurance and current accounts," Ms Diemont says. Problems are occurring because increased responsibility is not going hand-in-hand with more training, the survey found.