

Title:

What's changing in Customer Service? The top 5 new things that customers want.

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726

Summary:

Good customer service is paramount to growing a business and increasing profitability. What many managers are failing to realize, however, is that rapid changes in technology have lead to equally rapid changes in the delivery of quality customer service. In addition to the basics, here are five new areas of customer service that must be addressed to keep customers happy.

Keywords:

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Article Body:

We all know that good customer service is paramount to growing a business and increasing profitability. What many managers are failing to realize, however, is that rapid changes in technology have lead to equally rapid changes in the delivery of quality customer service.

In addition to the basics we all have heard time and again, there are five new areas of customer service that should be addressed to keep customers happy.

What do customers say?

1) Preserve me from auto-attendant hell! Customers are becoming increasingly annoyed and frustrated with having to sift through a multitude of options and press numerous buttons - only to be told that the desired service is only available through the company's website. Worse is when the auto-attendant uses voice recognition - but doesn't 'recognize' your voice.

It's understandable that companies want to reduce costs by using attendants and, there's no question that these are valuable tools. Yet, people want to connect with human beings; they don't want to listen to a long list of prompts - especially not if they are having a problem (and let's face it, that's what usually triggers the call in the first place). To keep customers happy, here are few simple tips:

- Always make it easy for customers to reach a human being.
- Give people the option of voice prompt or touch prompt.
- If you do use an auto-attendant, limit the number of menus to two rounds of choices before the customer reaches a human being.
- If you have asked the customer to key in account information, transfer the profile along with the call.
- If the call has been answered by a company rep, and needs to transfer the call to another department, do not put the customer back into a long queue. Instead, let your customer service rep be able to jump the front of the line, and get them to stay on the call with the client until the next person has picked up. Once this happens, the first rep should introduce the caller and give rep #2 a précis of the situation so the customer doesn't feel like he or she is having to start all over again.

2) Don't make me wait more than a couple of minutes in a phone queue. Many companies are making clients wait 15 minutes or more in a phone queue. Anything more than 2-3 minutes is considered unacceptable by more than 80% of customers surveyed.

3) Don't make me quote chapter and verse about my account to get simple information. In these days of increased white collar crime, it is reasonable, and sensible, for companies to protect their customers by ascertaining that they are dealing with the correct person before discussing an account. However, 3 questions should be the limit. Beyond that, it takes up too much time (costing the company money) and only frustrates your client.

4) Give me more flexibility in how I contact you. As communication options increase, so should the options that customers have for contacting your company. Offer clients the choice of scheduling appointments by going on-line or using their PDA to access a special appointment site. Let customers send a text message or e-mail to request that customer service call them within the hour. Enable customers to access their accounts on-line - and give them the ability to change billing and service options while there. Giving customers (who want it) the ability to interact more with their accounts will make them happier - and has the added benefit of saving companies money and employee time.

5) Don't tell me how I have to deal with you. Right now there are multiple generations of customers - which means multiple ways in which people want to interact with companies. Don't force everyone into the same mold, or you risk alienating at least one of the generational groups. It makes no sense to tell someone who is older and computer-phobic that they can only get their bills on-

line (and yes, a large percentage of people 60 years and older does not trust on-line "banking" and "account management" in any form)... just as it could cost you a customer if you were to tell a Gen Xer that there is no on-line access to their accounts. More than ever it's important to know how your customers want to be treated - and do deal with them their way.