

**Title:**

How to Get The Best Out Of Your Phone

**Word Count:**

1259

**Summary:**

The telephone can be a great tool to provide exceptional customer service but it can also destroy a customer's perception of your service. What steps can you take to ensure it adds something positive to the customer experience?

**Keywords:**

telephone technique, customer service on telephone

**Article Body:**

When Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone, little did he realise the positive effect it would have on customer service - or the negative effect it could also have!

Yes, the telephone can be a great tool in helping to provide exceptional customer service but it can also quickly destroy a customer's perception of your service. What steps can you take to ensure that, whenever you or your staff use the phone, it adds something positive to the customer experience?

Here are some ideas.

**<b>Answer Promptly</b>**

It's an old tip but one usually ignored! You are sitting at your desk, deep in thought, writing your monthly report and the phone rings. "I'll just finish this sentence quickly..." you say to yourself and before you know it, the phone has rung 10 times. The caller is unlikely to be in a good mood - assuming he hasn't already hung up!

Just try and remember the last time you sat on a phone with it ringing and ringing. What pictures came into your mind while you were waiting? An image of the person you are trying to call sitting at his desk chatting or casually drinking a cup of coffee? Didn't get you in a good mood did it? So why put your customers through it?

Aim to answer your phone within 3 to 5 rings. A prompt pick-up will get the

conversation off to a positive start and also avoids you having to open your conversation with an apology.

So, get to the phone as quick as you can.

### **<b>Be Enthusiastic</b>**

When you answer the phone make sure your voice conveys the message, "Really happy to be speaking to you!" Make your voice light, bring a feeling of enthusiastic emotion to your tone and most importantly sound eager. You don't want the caller thinking that you would rather be doing something else ... even if you do!

Get a real upbeat feeling into your opening greeting. Say your "Good morning" or "Good afternoon" with a strong, enthusiastic tone. This will immediately lift your caller's spirits and get you both off to a good start.

If you really are having a bad day (and we all get them!), and enforced enthusiasm is going to be struggle, stand up and take the call. This helps makes your voice lighter and the change in position and body language can have a positive impact. Try it out.

### **<b>Listen To What They Have To Say</b>**

You may think that you listen intently to all conversations you have. It's difficult enough to do this when you are face-to-face with someone, but over the phone without eye contact, keeping your attention is even more difficult. It's too easy, especially if the caller has a habit of padding out every point he wants to make, to think about the task you were just interrupted on, or about that chat you had with one of your suppliers earlier. Before you know it, you've lost track of what the caller is on about.

Actively listening to what is being said is a skill everyone needs if they are to use the phone as a tool for great customer service. But how can you keep your attention focused on what is being said?

- First of all, commit to yourself that you will actively listen. Without a clear commitment nothing ever happens
- Take notes during every call, even if you don't need to. The act of having to capture the caller's key points, will force you to listen. Just focus on writing down keywords, not complete sentences otherwise you'll be concentrating on writing and not listening!

- If an important statement has been made, repeat it back in your own words. This will force you to listen for the key points worth repeating
- Ask questions. Don't go too far with a constant barrage of questions but ask just enough to keep your mind alert

Active listening is not just about making sure you pick up all the key points; it's also about respecting the caller. They will feel they have been treated with importance and respect if it's clear you have been listening. Relevant questions and the occasional "Umm" can go a long way to making the caller feel they have been listened to.

#### **<b>Avoid Distractions</b>**

If possible, try and remove as many distractions as you can while speaking on the phone, especially if the call is important. If your office door is open and general office noise is affecting your listening, ask the caller to hold for a moment and close the door.

If someone walks into your office while you are taking an important call, indicate for him to stay outside or come back. It can be very distracting having someone sitting at your desk while you are talking.

If you were working on your PC when the call came through, turn and face away from it. You don't want your eyes and mind wandering back to look at the document you were working on!

Respect the caller's time and remove or avoid anything which may cause your mind to drift off.

#### **<b>Finish Strongly</b>**

When the call is coming to an end it's important to finish in a strong, convincing way. Summarise what has been agreed, what actions are to be taken and by whom. Leave the caller in no doubt as to what the next step is.

Just as your opening was full of enthusiasm, so should your closing statement. A good, strong and positive, "Good to talk you and speak to you soon" closer will bring the call to a satisfactory end. Your customer will hang up knowing that the call was worthwhile.

#### **<b>Answer Phone and Voicemail Messages</b>**

If you are not at your desk or in the office, any recorded message you leave is just as important in creating the right impression as the actual call itself. Some people don't like leaving messages but if your phone has the capability then use it. By leaving a message at least your customer will have the opportunity to partly satisfy the reason he called. Not being able to say anything can be frustrating.

Here are some thoughts on how to record effective messages:

- Write out the message before you record it. Don't do it off the cuff as it will probably be full of "umms" and pauses. It won't sound professional
- When recording, speak slowly and carefully, making sure that the caller can understand everything you say. This is especially the case for telephone numbers where you can be reached in an emergency
- Make the message punchy and to the point. Don't fill it with unnecessary information
- Call your number and listen to the message. If it doesn't sound right record it again and again until it does
- Regularly change your message to reflect what you are doing. If you are going to be away on holiday, give a date when you will be back. If you are out only for the morning, tell the caller you will return their call in the afternoon. Messages which are up to date will make the caller more confident about leaving a message

If used correctly the telephone can be a great asset in building a reputation for providing exceptional customer service. Used incorrectly, it can damage your business and give another reason for your customers to go and take their business elsewhere.