INTRODUCTION

It can be easy for customer service departments to continue doing what they’ve always been doing. CSAT scores and overall cost are the same, so why change? This mindset neglects the fact that today’s consumer has options around how they want to contact a company for support. We are firm believers in putting the “customer” back in “customer service.”

Based on feedback from our customers, product experts, and thought leaders, we’ve pulled together 20 customer service best practices, with five aimed at great service across channels, five around treating your customers well and 10 focused on building a world-class team.
20 BEST PRACTICES FOR DELIVERING OUTSTANDING CUSTOMER SERVICE

GREAT SERVICE ACROSS ALL CHANNELS
1. Know Your Customer Across Channels
2. Leverage the Information Your Customers are Volunteering
3. Use the Channels Your Customers Prefer
4. Make the Move Toward Mobile Customer Service
5. Train Your Agents on All Channels

TREAT CUSTOMERS LIKE FRIENDS
6. Share Helpful Content
7. Keep it Real
8. Turn Setbacks Into Solutions
9. Remember Your Regulations When Adding Support Channels
10. Leverage the Experts

BUILD YOUR TEAM
11. Start with the Interview
12. Hire for Culture Fit
13. Think Beyond the Cubicle
14. Implement Gamification
15. Leverage Multiple Channels to Reduce Monotony
16. Allow for Flexibility in Scheduling
17. Frame the Job in a Meaningful Way
18. Reward, Reward, Reward
19. Give Regular Feedback and Acknowledgement
20. Provide Opportunities for Career Growth
1. **KNOW YOUR CUSTOMER ACROSS CHANNELS**

Customers often report lower satisfaction when companies force them to visit multiple channels to resolve their support issues. Make sure your agents know your customers well, including what they want, their history with you, their preferred communication channels, etc. That way, if customers begin a conversation on email, they don’t have to start over if they switch to phone or live chat.

2. **LEVERAGE THE INFORMATION YOUR CUSTOMERS ARE VOLUNTEERING**

Use your contact center as the collection point for complaints, comments, and product suggestions. Your team should centralize all customer data in one place, making it accessible to anyone involved in the customer service experience.
3 USE THE CHANNELS YOUR CUSTOMERS PREFER

When a new customer arrives, that’s the time to find out which channels they prefer for service assistance. As part of your on-boarding process or welcome call, have your agents ask which channels customers prefer to use for service issues. If part of your on-boarding includes a welcome email, include a handy “cheat sheet” of all of your service team’s contact channels. As well, include calls-to-action in your marketing content asking customers to connect with you on their preferred mediums. Keep track of this data. You may uncover new ways to communicate, or find that one channel tends to be widely used – so more staff should focus there.

4 MAKE THE MOVE TOWARD MOBILE CUSTOMER SERVICE

Mobile options, such as text messaging, aren’t a dominant channel for most contact centers, but companies need to start thinking about it as a service option. Mobile offers a platform that’s always with the customer, and offers a real one on one feel. Does your customer service center consider other options for customers to connect, like mobile and beyond?
5

TRAIN YOUR AGENTS ON ALL CHANNELS

Your agents won’t become multichannel masters overnight. As you add service channels, your customer support agents need to be trained on how to use them effectively.

Staffing different channels means finding the hidden strengths of your existing service agents. Look at your team’s previous experience, and actively solicit writing samples to find your team’s most proficient writers. Make certain they’re trained and ready to respond to your customers on channels that require written responses, such as email.
SHARE HELPFUL CONTENT

To really empower your customers, you must help them become sources of knowledge. Useful content, whether it’s a blog post, webinar, or white paper, can not only help solve your customers’ issues, it can enable them to easily share this information with others.

To provide solid content, there has to be constant dialogue between the business and its customers to ensure the content is helpful, shareable and relevant to your customers’ needs and challenges. Delivering the resources customers need on a consistent basis will establish more trust for ongoing collaborative relationships.
Keep It Real

Ensure your customer service teams are genuine, and encourage an open and candid tone with customers. If your customers feel comfortable, they will speak honestly – which helps you solve problems faster.

Turn Setbacks into Solutions

Unfortunately, nearly all companies will have customers who like to gripe. Customer service provides a place for them to let off steam. Remember, this can be a productive development, helping current customers, as well as your product teams, understand product capabilities and limitations. Ensure your team treats every complaint as an opportunity to make your organization even better.
REMEMBER YOUR REGULATIONS WHEN ADDING SUPPORT CHANNELS

Ensure that with any customer interaction, industry regulations are followed. For instance, say your contact center is looking to add a live chat option which may be used to collect credit card data from customers. It’s crucial to ensure that this new option and your procedures are still in compliance with PCIDSS regulations.

These types of requirements are mandatory for any companies involved in credit card payment processing. Make sure that the required organizational policies are established and enforced. Implement solutions for quality management that fully comply with industry standards.
LEVERAGE THE EXPERTS

Encourage your agents to collaborate directly with the external experts in your industry. Choose experts that are devoted fans of your products, highly engaged, and ready to help others get the most out of your offerings to create even more highly satisfied customers.

START WITH THE INTERVIEW

During a session at 2013’s Call Center Week event, Kimberly Warrick, Client Services Manager at NJ Shares noted that agent motivation should be considered from the very first interview. Here, you have your prospective agent directly in front of you, ready to answer any questions. That’s the time to get your first look at what motivates them. Before they’ve even put on a headset, you’ve got the chance to make note of what will keep this potential service team member motivated. Just ask them!
HIRE FOR CULTURE FIT

Many agents will have the skills, fewer will have the attitude. The right culture fit should be what gets an agent hired. Sometimes, it may be worth keeping customer service positions open a bit longer to find the right person rather than rushing to fill available positions. The long-term cost of hiring the wrong person can be much greater than keeping those spots unfilled. Cutting down on attrition begins with bringing the right people on board in the first place.

THINK BEYOND THE CUBICLE

For many of today’s workers, it’s career first, company second. The millennial generation has huge career aspirations, and as potential hires, they often make up their mind during training whether they’ll work at your center for a long-term period. Telus International has seen a decline in attrition rates through initiatives such as Telus University, which allows employees to gain arts and business credits while still working with the company. They fully invest in their customer support team members’ development outside of the customer support role.
There is a plenty of buzz surrounding gamification in the sales industry, but the very same tactics can benefit contact centers as well. While targets may differ between sales and customer service teams, motivational techniques don’t have to. By bringing in realtime contests, reps can engage with colleagues, strengthening your company culture and improving center morale.

Gamification brings an element of fun to an occasionally monotonous job and leads to happier employees. Create a contest! Agents with the highest number of calls resolved without needing further followup receive a reward, such as two tickets to your local sports team’s game.
LEVERAGE MULTIPLE CHANNELS TO REDUCE MONOTONY

Adding new customer service channels doesn’t simply offer new options for customers to interact with your company. Agents benefit by acquiring and using additional skill sets that can improve their resumes while breaking up the monotony of their day. Many agents will welcome the change of pace and an opportunity to switch from answering calls to responding to emails and social media posts. Consider adding incentives that offer the opportunity to cover different channels if specific target goals are met.
ALLOW FOR FLEXIBILITY IN SCHEDULING

Many of today’s contact center agents are part-time, perhaps working at a second job, and they will require flexible schedules. This is also the case with any home–based agents you have, many of whom may be work-at-home parents. They’ll often encounter sudden and unexpected events that result in them having to cancel or trade a shift. Be as flexible as business needs will allow. Make a conscious effort to make trading of shifts as quick and easy as possible.

Consider leveraging your internal social networks to create a common space where agents can offer to give away and pick up shifts. Trust your agents to trade only with equally skilled agents and keep management’s involvement in the shift trading process as minimal as possible. A company that recognizes that agents require that flexibility in their work schedule, and whose management team trusts employees enough to make shift changes happen easily, is a company that will attract and retain a higher percentage of their workforce.
Marc Bernica, VP at Bright Horizons Family Solutions, notes the importance of framing jobs in a way that makes employees feel proud to do them. In order to accomplish this, he recommends getting your agents to answer three questions:

- How does this role contribute to our success?
- How do you help people?
- What can you do better than anyone else?

When your service agents are asked what they do for a living, do they say they are a customer service representative? That they “talk on the phone all day”? Or do they say, “I help people with ________.” The latter is the ideal response. Your employees need to know they are making a real difference for your customers, and they aren’t just a collection of metrics and numbers.
This may be a bit of a no-brainer but it bears inclusion. Reward employees for a job well done and be certain the rewards are those that can be put to use outside of the company walls. Work-life balance is important to your employees, so if possible, keep your reward initiatives focused on helping your agents make better use of their time away from the contact center. Be it tickets to local events or gift cards, make certain your rewards recognize that your team has a life outside the office and you’re happy to help make that life more exciting.
GIVE REGULAR FEEDBACK AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

You don’t always need to spend money on tangible rewards in order to make your team feel motivated. Quite often, a supervisor’s quick email or internal social network mention to a team member on a job well done is equally as effective as a gift certificate. Tom Dalton, Relationship Coordinator Manager at HealthFirst, makes it a point to send out as many acknowledgement emails per week as possible. If an agent reaches a particular target, say reducing their average handle time, Tom sends a quick email to let them know he’s noticed and he’s appreciative of their fine work. Continue to celebrate even incremental successes with even the smallest acknowledgement can brighten the day of an agent dealing with an otherwise stressful shift.
PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR CAREER GROWTH

A lack of career opportunities is often one of the top reasons for leaving a job. Experienced, top performing support agents often feel like they’ve hit a glass ceiling in a contact center. Try allowing these agents opportunities to try out new roles, even temporarily. This can be achieved through shadowing, or “day in the life” type programs.

If you offer educational opportunities, your agents could soon be developing knowledge and skills that may make them attractive to other parts of the company, such as training, sales, or marketing. Be sure to stay on top of your best people, find out how they’re feeling and if they’re still motivated in their current role. Are they interested in a management position?
CONCLUSION

So how can you take the best practices outlined here and make them work for you? All it takes is a commitment to becoming a true customer company with a mission statement reinforcing a complete focus on your customers and their satisfaction. In addition, ensure you have an empowered customer support team, where agents are armed with responsibility and feel that they are making a real contribution to the company’s overall health. This will absolutely translate into increased customer satisfaction and loyalty.
CUSTOMER SERVICE SOLUTIONS THAT WILL MAKE YOUR BUSINESS MORE PRODUCTIVE

The world is changing. Customers are demanding more and better service, delivered through every conceivable channel. That’s why more companies are using salesforce.com’s customer service software-as-a-service solution for call center CRM and help desk management.
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