

Making It Easy For Your Customer To Reach You

by Peter F. Theis, president, ConServIT Integrated Teleservices

The importance of a call center is well recognized by most sales and marketing professionals. For many businesses, it is not only the principal way customers communicate with their supplier, but the customer's image of the organization is conveyed to the caller by the way calls are handled. There is an unspoken image creating communication outside of the words spoken to the caller. For example, the expression "Your call is important to us" in a message placing the caller on hold sends a message that is very contrary to the words spoken. The image is of insincerity and not caring.

Most customers, whether in a business to business or a business to consumer industry, are busy people, or at least they like to think of themselves as being busy. They are in a hurry and call to get a job done. As a supplier, it goes without saying, your job is to make their experience expeditious and pleasant. To do so saves you money, and generates follow up business. Failing to do so generates table talk behind the company's back. There is little opportunity for recovery from the spread of such a reputation.

There is nothing new or earthshaking in these statements. Your reaction may well be "Of course. What's the big deal?" It is the incongruity between what you know intuitively and what happens when you call a supplier that is the "big deal". What happens when your customer tries to contact your company?

In this context, consider these common ways customer calls are handled:

- a) You, the customer/caller, are directed into a voice mail machine so that the supplier can call you back at its convenience, not yours – a practice that requires that you, the customer, must be available and off the phone at the moment the supplier decides to make the call back.
- b) You, the customer/caller, must listen to and participate in a lengthy selection tree, which, after having made your selection, then requires you to listen to another selection tree, and on and on, only to finally be told to please hold waiting for an operator. And the selection trees may not provide the selection you wanted. That supplier has just cost you time and inconvenience to save itself a few cents. That lack of consideration comes through to the caller.
- c) You, the customer/caller, are placed on extended hold without any escape alternative other than to hang up and call back again. To rub the supplier's own lack of service in your face, they spend your time giving you promotional messages and forcing you to listen (that practice is particularly annoying if waiting for an operator while on a speaker phone).

Nothing could be further from making it easy for the caller. The reason so much of the new technology has taken this strange path is that companies have thought in terms of what makes it easy/cheaper for the company first and foremost, and, as a secondary consideration, rationalizing the benefits to you, the caller/customer.

There is an alternative philosophy and technology. Make it easy for the caller first, and then build the corporate cost savings models as a secondary consideration. Make the sale, book the revenue, satisfy the customer as a first order of business, and then work on the computer systems, the database, the position information and so forth. Make the customer/caller first, not last.

Technology is now available, called natural speech technology (NST), that can service your incoming calls just as your own staff would, conversationally with open ended questions (“Can I help you?”). Callers needing special services or wanting to speak to an operator will be switched to an operator; callers wanting to place an order can place the order conversationally in natural speech; callers wanting information about a product can be sent/emailed/faxed the information. There is no selection tree, say “this” or punch “that”, no holding (unless the caller wants to speak to an operator and elects to wait rather than be called back at whatever time the caller requests).

ConServIT, with almost thirty years of automatically handling calls, has pioneered the development and implementation of NST technology. It is being used and is proven. No pie in the sky. In customer satisfaction tests, it has outperformed both live and other automation alternatives. It also outperforms based on accuracy and the percentage of calls successfully completed. You can read more about ConServIT and natural speech technology by visiting their website at www.conservit.com.

The reason the paradox exists between what sales and marketing professionals know, and what is most often experienced is that for most companies the oversight of the implementation of programs to handle callers is delegated to either the information technology people or operation people who buy equipment and operate software and computers. Their expertise is in neither sales nor marketing. The way your customers and prospects are served when they call is a responsibility of sales and must not be delegated. The lens of the IT professional and vendors of the software or hardware is diametrically opposite that of a sales or marketing professional. Look at the caller relationship first, and then the technology to reduce costs and improve efficiency – not the other way around. Remember, from an operations point of view, the cheapest way to service incoming customer calls is not to answer them at all (which is what some companies do when requiring all customers contact them only by email).

If putting your customers first is your reason for being in business, make it easier for them by using ConServIT’s natural speech technologies as part of your

solution. You'll win kudos and lower your costs as well. For more information visit ConServIT's website at www.conservit.com or call Peter Theis, president, at 1-800-994-4400.

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