

Driving Response Through Extraordinary Customer Experiences



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There are only a handful of opportunities to build your brand outside of advertising – point of sale, point of use, or when a customer has an issue are a few. Each of these instances creates a make-or-break moment. Provide a truly fantastic customer experience and your brand will flourish; provide a subpar experience and watch it flounder.

So, how do you assure your customers (and potential customers) will have extraordinary experiences every time? That's a question those of us in the call center industry grapple with on a daily basis. Fortunately, with each and every call, we continue to more clearly define the answer, which is simple: you have to do it all.

Breaking down customer satisfaction

So just what makes a customer deem a service experience "extraordinary"? At InfoCision, we recently ran a customer-care program for a client that dealt with customers looking to downgrade or cancel a service. This particular program was incredibly successful, but, as far as we could tell, there was no one single thing we did that drove this success. Rather, it was the culmination of a lot of little things.

On average, we answered customer calls 30 percent faster - which led to fewer angry callbacks. We also equipped our communicators with better training and data, helping them identify alternatives and solutions faster (this made the average call about 30 seconds shorter, and helped to resolve 10 percent more issues on the first call). Finally, we called back twice as many customers to follow up on unresolved issues within the first 24 hours.

All of these things added up to the fact that customers were more satisfied (by about 11 percentage points), and 75 percent fewer customers actually cancelled than were planning to before we started working with the client.

Identifying sources of dissatisfaction

Another study we completed looked at the impact of customer satisfaction on long-term customer value. This study was for a client that sold a product with monthly renewals, and the research looked at three common aspects of every call: (1)

Did the client's call get answered? (2) Did the client feel his or her call was dealt with appropriately? (3) Were concerns and/or issues handled quickly and efficiently?

As a result of this study, we found: when a customer's call went unanswered, that customer stopped purchasing 4 percent earlier; when a customer scored his or her call experience at 79 percent or less (done through an end-of-call satisfaction survey), he or she stopped purchasing 6 percent earlier; and when a customer failed to get a problem resolved quickly, he or she stopped purchasing 12 percent earlier.

These may not seem like huge numbers, but when you improve all three areas – client satisfaction, first-call resolution and service rate – long-term retained customer value improves dramatically.

Facilitating prospect decision-making

A final study I'll mention was used to determine the effect of time lag on eventual response when a prospective customer is requesting more information. Our hypothesis was that, when people were considering a buying decision but sitting on the fence, the timeliness of when they received requested additional information would affect their decisions.

To test the effect of timing on the fulfillment of collateral material for noncommittal prospects who wanted more information, a controlled test was organized at our fulfillment center to compare sending the materials: 1) within 24 hours of the phone call; 2) at the 72-hour mark (twice a week deliveries); 3) at the 168-hour mark (once a week deliveries).

We found that the group that sent its collateral packages within 24 hours converted at a 3 percent higher rate than those mailed twice weekly, and at a 22 percent higher rate

than those mailed weekly. Of even greater significance, those who had their information sent within 24 hours had a 14 percent higher average spending rate than those in the second group.

Recognizing characteristics of extraordinary service

So what does all this ultimately tell us? First and foremost, it tells us an extraordinary customer experience is not made by doing one big thing right – it's made by doing a lot of little things right. With that in mind, there are several overlapping touchstones of great customer care that seem to emerge from these studies:

Timeliness

Time is decidedly not on your side. The longer people are on hold, the more difficult the interaction. Every second, minute or day that goes by where a customer remains unfulfilled can cost your brand. Complaint, question and change calls need

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to be answered quickly (generally, in less than 30 seconds). And, whenever possible, requested materials should be mailed within 24 hours.

The lessons of timeliness learned in our fulfillment study translate to the phones, the Web, or any other medium. We've tested this theory repeatedly – across commercial clients and nonprofit 'maybe' donation responses alike – and the results are always similar. Specifically, you get a better return by responding to your clients quickly and personally.

Efficiency

Making things as easy as possible for the customer is essential to both saving time and ensuring customer satisfac-

tion. Reduce the steps the customer has to take to upgrade a service, get more information about a product or make a donation, and response rate and satisfaction will improve. An extraordinary experience is an easy experience – one that requires minimal work from the customer's end.

To streamline calls for your customers, make sure your communicators have access to all the appropriate product and/or service information so they can answer questions quickly and efficiently. And try to eliminate having to escalate issues to other people in the network. This should occur less than 10 percent of the time.

First-call resolution

Perhaps most importantly, try to resolve the customer's issue or answer their question on the first call. When a customer hangs up knowing their issue has been resolved, their question has been answered or additional information is on its way, they feel good about the experience. There is a sense of closure, accomplishment, satisfaction. That's when brand strength soars.

You should strive to provide a resolution for clients the first time they call every call. No matter what program you're working on, the goal should be to end the call with a resolution or a decision. Though the actual metric depends on the industry and product, shooting for a resolution rate higher than 85 percent is a good rule of thumb.

Follow up

When issues cannot be resolved, provide a timeline of when they will be and follow up. Make sure the action items were completed as promised, and do everything you can to spin the experience into a positive one for the customer – even if the interactions leading up to that call have been primarily negative.

From the front end to the back end, building outstanding customer experiences means managing everything in the value chain well. From data preparation to the voice on the phone, all the gears need to be churning flawlessly in unison. When they are, the customer will almost invariably reward you with their trust, confidence and loyalty. **CIS**

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