

Have You Ever Called Your Own Business?

No company ever set out to deliver poor customer service. But it's shocking how many firms provide such a sub-standard customer experience without even realizing it. Try this experiment: Call into your own business as if you were a customer.

Start with a common question on your product or service, and see how long it takes you to get it answered. How long were you on hold? How many times were you transferred, and what was the time between transfers? How were the call quality and the overall experience?

Now, do it all again — this time with a serious technical question or product concern. Call in with a question that you know will take multiple internal resources to resolve. How was your call experience this time? If the answer was "not great," then read on.

Vocal Laboratories points out five reasons why companies do not understand customer's demands and fail to provide a quality experience when the customer calls the business:¹

1. Failing to ask the customers their opinion on the call experience
2. Failing to gather meaningful call data on the business — such as time-on-hold, abandonment rate, IVR containment rate, etc.
3. Failing to gather enough data that's statistically significant
4. Failing to understand the data in a way that drives meaningful decisions
5. Failing to use the data effectively

Vocalabs points out that while it may be easy to identify a problem that 20% of callers are experiencing, finding a problem that only 1% of customers experience can be a challenge. But that 1% can have a real impact on operational costs, as enabling 1% more customers to finish their tasks in a self-service system could save an organization tens of thousands per month in a high volume call center environment.²

Visibility is Critical

Effective caller research is essential to building visibility into the customer experience. You need to develop a profile of metrics such as a typical customer's patience. This could be patience with being put on hold, or patience navigating through the prompts of your phone system. Customer patience can actually vary depending on the type of business that person is dealing with. Customers will typically be willing to hold longer when dealing with a monopolistic business (such as a utility company) when compared to a highly competitive industry where the customer can easily take his or her business elsewhere.

The next step is to take this information and compare it to metrics such as your company's average time-to-answer calls. If you discover a gap exists between customer patience and your average time-to-answer, you have a problem. But you can use the right phone system to help gather some of these metrics, identify the issues to address, and help you to overcome these challenges.



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Caller Empowerment

Phone technology can deploy several strategies to make customers feel empowered rather than frustrated when they call your business. Presence Management can speed the time it takes for a caller to find the resource they are looking for. But often there is hold-time that cannot be avoided. That's why your system should be configured to make your customer feel like they can control what happens next. The caller can be given the option to wait for their call to go through, or they can be directed to automated information that may address their need. The option to go to voicemail should also be present if the customer simply cannot spend time on the phone. By presenting the caller with options other than wait or hang up, you can build up that patience level discussed earlier.

Employee Empowerment

There are also several methods to empower your employees to raise their own level of customer service standards. With Computer-Telephony Integration (CTI), you can integrate common software such as a CRM application with your phone system. Now, if the system logs an abandoned call, a customer service representative can pull up that customer's record and call that individual back as soon as possible. And when an inbound call comes in, the system can recognize the number and have all of the customer's files ready to access by the representative. Finally, a help request button can be part of the CSR's interface, enabling the notification of management in case assistance is needed on a problem call.

Every Business Should Improve the Caller Experience

You may think that such functionality is only available through large call centers. But the reality is that all of this capability can be deployed even to a small-to-medium business. You just need to work with a vendor who has the latest technology to accommodate your needs. By working with such a vendor, you can build out a true customer loyalty strategy designed around building relationships in the long term.

Once you have developed a profile of your customers, identified the issues they are having with your system, and finally deploying new technology to correct those issues and improve the caller experience, it's time for the last step. Call back into your own business. We think you'll like what you hear.

¹ Peter Leppik and David Leppik, "Gourmet Customer Service: A Scientific Approach to Improving the Caller Experience," Vocal Laboratories, (2005), <http://www.vocalabs.com/sites/default/files/Chapter1.pdf>

² Peter Leppik and David Leppik, "Gourmet Customer Service: A Scientific Approach to Improving the Caller Experience," Vocal Laboratories, (2005), <http://www.vocalabs.com/sites/default/files/AppendixA.pdf>



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