



In Queue

The fun, informative and interesting newsletter for
the call center industry.

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Quotes

*"The customer doesn't expect
everything will go right all the
time; the big test is what you do
when things go wrong."*
-Sir Colin Marshall

Offloading Your Customers

An *In Queue* reader brought this newsworthy subject to my attention a few weeks ago.

In June a group of Sprint/Nextel customers received a letter from the company telling them thanks, but no thanks, they are not the type of customers that the company desires and their contracts would be terminated on 30 July. Why? Because they use too much call center time (agent time=money) compared to the value of their monthly bill to the company.

So my gut reaction to this article was one of dismay. Did the company really do this? Is it right? My next reaction was, wow! Take your least profitable customers and tell them bye-bye. If they still want service, they go to your competitor. So Sprint has removed their low or no profit customers which helps their bottom line while sending them to their competitor which should hurt the competition's bottom line (creating a competitive disadvantage for your competition), which is also good for Sprint. My final reaction brings me back to my initial gut reaction. Not all customers produce a 40% margin, some will produce a 15% margin, and some will even be loss leaders. However, customers evolve, some gain money, some lose, and their purchasing power will change over time and be reflected in their wireless plan and bill. This is part of the risk businesses have in a mass market product. If I buy a candy bar at Wal-Mart for \$1.00, I am sure that I am not paying for the total cost of the heating and air conditioning, the labor it cost to sell me the candy bar, the cement that my car is parked on in the parking lot, etc. But does Wal-Mart say, you must purchase at least \$50.00 worth of items and be out of the store in 30 minute or less or you are not a worthy customer? Does a restaurant tell you that you must order an expensive meal to justify paying a waiter to serve you? Or can you go in, order a cup of coffee, and sit, relax or read a newspaper or book? Do gas stations tell customers who purchase only a gallon of gas to make it to work with a handful of change that they must buy at least 10 gallons to justify the expense of the person behind the counter? Nope, nope and nope.

I would love to hear that one of these Sprint wireless customers was the daughter away at college of an executive in

Forrester Research
has issued its new
Forrester Wave™
report on Customer
Service Management

eGain -Customer Service & Contact
Center Software

Fun Facts

Contact Babel, through the ATA, recently published The US Contact Center Operational Review. We have asked some of our advisory board members to review this 258 page document and share their unbiased review of the report with you so you don't have to. Expect to see some of these reviews in forthcoming issues of *In Queue*.

Picture of the Week



Getting away from the monuments for an issue, this is part of a billboard advertisement in the Paris Metro (subway). The top panel shows a woman call center worker with a headset on, the mid section shows the body of a waiter, and the bottom section, not shown, had a construction worker in jeans and work boots. The caption reads, loosely translated "Any Job You Want, Click Here." It would appear that call center jobs are becoming more recognizable to the average person with the image of a smiling face wearing a headset.

a Fortune 500 company who is now mad at such a move and chooses to find another cell phone company to meet the company's wireless contract needs, a B2B contract valued in the millions of dollars each year. Moreover, I desire to see an advertisement from a Sprint competitor that would go something like this.

"Did you know that Sprint/Nextel is going through their list of customers to determine who is deemed valuable enough to still have their service? Maybe you are next in line? Here at NACC Wireless we love our customers, no matter how small or large, we know customers are at the heart of our business. So we invite all the Sprint/Nextel customers who had their service cancelled, and those of you who are on the next list of cuts, to come over to NACC Wireless. We will waive all activation fees and you can talk to our call center agents, the best in the business, as long as necessary to resolve any issues you may have with your service or bill. We love our customers and because of that, our customers love NACC Wireless"

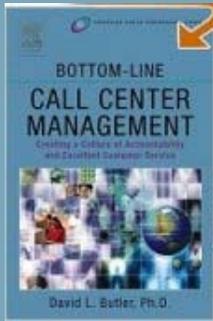
How Important are Your Customers?

Richard Snow, NACC Advisory Board Member and VP and Research Director for Contact Centers Ventana Research Richard.Snow@ventanaresearch.com

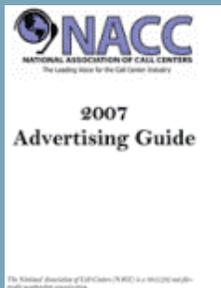
A simple question that you would imagine has a simple answer – extremely important. All the research benchmarks completed by Ventana Research seem to support the view that indeed organizations do value their customers, as the number one business driver for contact centers is invariably to improve customer satisfaction. But is this really the case – recent reports in the UK national press about two independent studies seems to suggest otherwise.

In a study commissioned by the UK government into life in the UK today, contact centers managed to make number four in the list of things that irritate people most in their daily lives. And another study, again carried out in the UK by Merchants Consulting, found that 18 percent of customers had left a company because of a bad experience with a call center. The top five given reasons were: agents with a poor command of English, long queue times, being put on hold, issues not resolved, and complex IVR menus. This latter study seems to paint a much rosier picture than a study carried out by Genesys that found that 40 percent of consumers had stopped doing business with a company solely due to a poor call center experience.

So which ever way you look at it, it seems questionable that organizations really care especially when it comes to the way that they treat their customers in the contact center. Indeed many organizations now seem to recognize this, as another recent Ventana Research study showed that only 11 percent of organizations believe they are keeping their customers totally



The price has finally dropped at Amazon.com for my book. Why? Probably because the book has been in print for 3 years now and sales are starting to slow. So if any of you were waiting to purchase the book until the price was discounted, this is the time. The content is still good and relevant, even if 3 years old, but so much has happened in the industry in the past 3 years that it is probably time to write an updated revised edition.



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satisfied all of the time. So what is getting in the way of the stated intent to improve customer satisfaction? The Merchants' study gives us the clue – COST. Agents not having a good command of English is a direct results of offshore outsourcing, long queue times is simply not having enough agents to meet demands, and complex IVR menus comes from trying to avoid customers speaking directly with agents. The final two reasons most likely occur because agents haven't received sufficient training, or they are not empowered to help, or they simple cannot access the information they need to resolve customer issues.

The latter is masking what we believe to be a serious issue. In an unrelated study, we found that 26 percent of organizations estimate they have customer data in up to twenty different types of systems. That is not simply 20 systems, but 20 different types of systems from ERP, CRM, business applications, spreadsheets, data warehouses, portals etc. etc. When you allow for multiple instances of the same system, that is a lot of sources of customer data which are rarely kept synchronised and up-to-date. So knowing who the customer is and having a 360 degree of their business with company is nigh on impossible. This makes the agent's job difficult at best, it makes making informed decisions extremely hard, and it means customers get different answers depending on who they speak to or what channel they use to make their inquiry. All of which adds to the cost of running a center, means potential business is being lost, and customer satisfaction levels are going down, not up.

The short term answers lies in the agent desktop. Vendors such as Chordiant and Jacada provide systems that effectively hide all this mess by pre-programming the systems interfaces so accessing data and updating systems is all hidden from the agent. They come with a second major benefit. Systems were rarely programmed to follow the flow of a conversation, meaning that agents have to navigate back and forth across systems and also through what are often complex screen layouts. These solutions mean the user interface can be re-designed to better reflex different call scenarios and the system once more takes care of updating the background systems. This has enabled organizations to make dramatic improvement in average call length, has made the agents life so much better, and as a result has achieved the ultimate goal to improve customer satisfaction.

What are YOU Reading or Watching?

Submit a book, movie, software, television show, a kid's soccer game, or any other review to the *In Queue* newsletter by emailing me, David.Butler@nationalcallcenters.org with your idea. More people are interested in what you are reading, watching, using and doing than you realize.

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