



5 tips to happy Gen Y customers

*'I want it now' consumers with choice on their side are pushing to get the most out of products and services, and are ready to complain when their experience falls short. **John O'Brien**, vice president for FrontRange Solutions in Asia Pacific has some tips to keep on top...*

It's tough to put a dollar figure on the impact of a positive customer experience, however few would argue that without it, customer retention and revenue generation would be a hard task indeed.

Far from a necessary expense, customer service is becoming "the new marketing" - and with good reason. Disgruntled customers now have a powerful voice amplified through their digital social connections.

A recent example demonstrating the power of the individual is Vodafail.com, the website that was launched in December 2010 by university graduate Adam Brimo, 23, following a series of network problems he experienced shortly after signing up to a two-year contract with Vodafone Australia. The website, which was designed to draw attention to the issues facing Vodafone customers, has processed over 15,000 complaints, and attracted more than 150,000 visitors. Brimo was recently awarded a Consumer Champion Award by Australian watchdog Choice - itself dedicated to outing bad service. People have always liked a good moan, but the difference these days is there are multiple public outlets for doing so.

Customers are changing, becoming savvier, and expecting service to keep pace with their expectations. Customers want service in the way that's most convenient for them, from anywhere, at any time. As 'Gen Y' enters the workplace and increase their value as consumers, they are increasingly demanding more personalised and tailored services, as well as more ways to interact with the companies they do business with.

Perhaps the most important factor in delivering high quality service is to provide customers with a meaningful and consistent service experience through several channels. Workplace and lifestyle habits dictate that service must be available when and how the customer wants it. The challenge for business is to understand the channels that are being used or demanded, and provide resources to match to ensure adequate servicing without overspending.

Today's customers are demanding additional channels beyond the freephone number such as web self-service,

PHOTO: JANE DEMPSTER, HERALD SUN



Adam Brimo contemplates his next Vodafail class action

e-mail, online chat, text, self-help knowledge banks, FAQs, ask-the-experts, podcasts and video recordings for “how to” instructions, and interactive or on-demand webinars. And with technology, it doesn’t have to be a “price versus service” equation, but trying to do them all may not be the answer either.

The technology most commonly used to support customer relationships is, not suprisingly, Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software. However, many CRM systems are directed entirely at the sales process. Once a customer buys, the CRM system becomes nothing more than an historical record, useful only when it’s time to sell to that customer again. From the customers’ perspective, it’s all about the experience they have every time they contact your company. And nowhere is that contact more important than when customers call for help or service - or to complain.

To help move organisations toward improving their customer service offerings, here are 5 key steps to consider:

1. Listen

Ensure you are actually “listening to your customers” frequently and include the full range of your full customer demographics (crossing age, gender, location) to get a true idea of their actual service needs. Customer Service analytics can help you manage customer expectations. Specific needs for each demographic group can be quite varied: the service requirements of a 65 year old customer are quite different from a young mobile professional.

2. Leverage technology

Tailor your service offerings so they meet the growing service demands, but effectively use technology to do so, minimising the service delivery costs. Leverage workflow-based customer service applications to efficiently manage each service request, the activities involved in each request, and the communications (both internal and external) for these requests.

CUSTOMERS ARE CHANGING, BECOMING SAVVIER, AND EXPECTING SERVICE TO KEEP APACE WITH THEIR EXPECTATIONS.

3. Open up

Increase your service offering from the basic phone channel. Even adding one additional channel like web self-service or self-help will send the message to your customers that you are ‘responsive’ to their service needs.

4. Incentivise

Change your employee incentive programs to encourage and reward your employees for taking tangible actions to meet customer needs and permanently solve real customer issues at the root cause, not simply finding a temporary work-around. Use the quality management aspects of your phone system (e.g. call recording, whisper coaching, and silent listening) to help improve the customer service agents productivity and again, reward accordingly.

5. Train

Build training programs that have service as the key focus element, so that every action you take for customers has service at the heart of the offering; that all things done for customers should be done with service in mind.

Technology is the key to enhancing the customer experience. It’s about empowering the customer to do business when, where and how they prefer. Ultimately, that helps companies keep demanding customers happy - and happy customers have a habit of attracting others. **f**