

16 | opinion

Can't get no satisfaction?

Call centre targets lead to customer dissatisfaction and churn, argues **Andrea Goodall**. So why not try having an actual conversation with your customers?

After working in and managing call centres for the last 20 years, I am still amazed to find so many spending more time tracking call duration and individual agents' statistics than understanding the needs of their customers.

Surely the most important question for any business is how can we offer our customers the service they need to ensure customer loyalty?

We often delude ourselves that we 'know' our customers because we talk to them so often and believe that we are experts in call quality. But how many managers have ever taken the time to meet their customers face-to-face?

Nothing can beat sitting down with one of your best customers over a cup of tea in their own home and finding out first-hand what they expect from your call centre. It's simple — pick up the phone and ask ten of your best customers if you can come around and see them — at least three will be only too pleased to talk about their experiences.

What I have found is that customers like to feel they can express themselves. This can mean all kinds of things: asking questions, sharing experiences, making people laugh, having a chat.

I am sure customers would be horrified to learn that their calls are being timed and the agent is concentrating more on their call duration targets than

meeting their needs. But the question is, how long should this conversation last?

The obvious answer, and the one that increasingly gets lost in our pursuit of the perfect set of KPIs, is that it 'all depends'. Achieving real conversations with customers can happen quickly or, more often, slowly over the course of a long telephone call. The point here is that the customer has been given the opportunity to interact not with an agent, but a person who also enjoys having conversations. And it's this interaction that leaves the customer with the feeling of an enjoyable experience.

But what about your screaming financial director who is ranting that all these 'conversations' are costing us money, profit and shareholder value?

Well, the answer is just as straightforward. Real conversations do generate revenue and profit. It's during these conversations that customers start to open up, explain their needs and tell you what they are trying to achieve. And what's more, the person on the end of the line is the only one that can help.

So, back to management speak: the opportunity is there for the taking to cross-sell, to upsell, to retain a customer, to create an advocate for your brand — simply by listening and responding with finely-tuned help and advice.

Unfortunately, for some of you, management will take a different view



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of these interactions with customers. I've found that only enlightened managers understand that trust and rapport are developed during 'real conversations'. They are prepared to face a sceptical board and defend what is the true value of customer interaction. Like me, they believe the only true KPI that makes moral and financial sense is customer satisfaction. ■

Pick up the phone and ask your ten best customers for a chat