

More sale and profit due to an effective customer service

by Ruud Jansen

Sorry but what do you mean by: "support from the helpdesk?"

Recently my internet and email were down and I had to get support from my provider to get it fixed. Obviously I could not use my email so had to find their telephone number. Everywhere in my documentation I found their email addresses but nothing about a telephone number! So I started to look in a telephone book and finally I had success and was able to contact my providers' helpdesk. I immediately got the usual tape with options that I had to choose and was told that the charge for all of this was 0.10 cent per minute.

I also had to type in my customer number so that the support could come available immediately. After having typed in a few numbers that were corresponding with the problems I had with my connection, the voice on the tape came back and said that all employees were busy and that I still had to wait a little longer. This message came along for minutes and finally a help desk employee came on the phone. I had to provide again the information about my address and zip code so finally the person knew exactly who I was. After having explained my problem, it appeared that I should have chosen for another option so I was put back in the row and could start all over again. Apparently my email problem was quite complex as this routine was repeated a couple of times more and every time I got another helpdesk employee on the phone. Finally I asked the employee to call me back when it was clear who finally could help me and fix the problem. The employee explained to me that this was not possible: when he would finish the call, immediately another customer would be on the line and he had no time to make notes or call customers back so I had to go back in 'wait-state'. After all, I spent more than an hour on the phone and after all it appeared that the problem was caused by the provider itself! So I lost one hour of my precious time and more than 7 \$ to fix a problem that was, 'mind you' caused not by me but by the internet provider!

This story is not on its own. Daily, thousands of customers are suffering from this kind of lousy service and loose time and money and get frustrated when they are faced with problems that have been generated by the provider and its organization itself. Helpdesks fence themselves in by having communication only via email or by raising time consuming telephone procedures so that in a lot of situations, customers stop their attempts. Generally, there is something wrong with the attitude of the help desk employee or with their skills; my experience is that in a lot of cases, they have to rely on other colleagues or simply transfer their problem to another one without bothering about the resolution of the issue. A lot of companies have outsourced their customer support to external companies and consequently their employees have usually not so much affinity with the business of this mother company. I also see that customer support centers work with systems containing a lot of customer data but that information is not used properly and effectively. How is it possible that I had to provide my personal data every time I was transferred to another helpdesk employee and why did I had to type in my customer number upfront?

After all nothing was done with it!

So there is no good customer service anymore?

It really can work in a total different way ! For many years, I have been reading Holland most well-known morning paper, de Telegraaf, and they keep surprising me with their excellent and professional service. With just a simple telephone call, you can suspend your paper during your holiday and if you call, the next day already everything has been fixed and the delivery of your paper has been stopped. You will receive a written confirmation and your annual invoice will be credited accordingly and when you have returned from holiday they

have resumed the distribution of your paper. Recently I called them because I tried to start an account on their internet site so that I would be able to make use of their internet services as well. I immediately got somebody on the phone (no waiting time and no tape!) and also had to provide my zip code but this time, the lady of the customer service used the info that I provided properly and mentioned my name. She looked at my profile in her system and could see that I once started to make an account on their internet site but refrained from finalizing it. So the internet system already recognized me but was not able to become active. To fix this, I had to be transferred to another employee and within a few moments, I got another person on the phone who already knew me, exactly understood the problem and also mentioned my name. Again within a few moments, the problem was fixed and I could work on my new account on their internet site. What a difference with my service provider! There is another company, called Vista Print, that makes me happy frequently. They offer business cards, brochures, agenda's and all of other attributes for businesses. What I like of Vista Print is that apart from offering their products electronically which is not so special, you can also design your own business cards or brochures on line! You choose from a number of templates your sample and complete this with your own company information. During this process, you can use the view function to see the result. After having finalized your template you can go to the final lay out to give your confirmation and subsequently your credit card will be charged and within a few days your business cards will arrive. When your product has been shipped by Vista, you will get an e-invoice, properly specified with VAT separate. Vista has a lot of last minute offerings that gives you the ability to buy their products for a very good price. I made use of their special offerings a couple of times and I am pretty impressed about their excellent customer service and see that anything that this company does, has been over thought and put in customer perspective.

Give your customers a 'royal' treatment

As a company you can increase your revenue and profit by letting grow your 'loyal customer' base. You may be familiar with the 80-20 rule where 80% of your revenue comes from only 20% of your customers. It is absolutely necessary to please and satisfy this 20% of your customers in all aspects so that they keep ordering your products. A loyal customer is the biggest richness for an enterprise and a customer service that operates with excellence is key to build up the customer relationship. The faster and more effective the service is, the more customers will remain happy.

Basic rules for such an excellent customer service are:

- solve customer questions and problems as soon as possible and to provide the customer additional feedback about how the problem was solved or keep them informed in the meanwhile
- be active in following the customer problem till the moment that the problem has been fixed
- create system access for your employees to enable them to monitor customer orders, customer complaints, overviews etc. and further optimize your customer systems
- create in addition to your existing telephone support options for your customers to let them view in your systems about the status of their problem, their order and make them in other ways 'self supporting'
- take over complex issues from your customer and take care for feed back to your customer during the trajectory of problem solving
- take care for subject matter experts on your customer service department by providing proper training and education

- create customer awareness with your customer support staff where by solving problems immediately becomes a 'way of life'

New challenges for customer service

In this way, customer service can start to play a far more important role in their contacts with customers (moment of truth) and make use of their position to help them to get more benefits out of the products you sold before. And that leads again to sale of additional products and services, incremental or even orders for complete new products. We live in a world where the customer gets more and more power and the traditional sales model with a pushy sales man becomes obsolete. It is much better to create an atmosphere where customers choose for your company rather than to try to sell your products by a salesman who desperately tries to make his annual quota. And when is the right moment to convince your customer to choose for your company? Exactly, at the moment that your customer is asking for help with your customer service. In that way, your customer centre is the most important difference between your company and your competitors and can become the important source for more revenue. However, don't make the same mistake as other companies made by changing your customer centre, per definition a cost centre, into a profit centre and change customer service employees into sales people.

Customers will recognize this and loose confident in the quality of your service that was build with so many efforts. So let your customer service staff provide high quality service in problem solving and build up your customer relationship in creating an atmosphere where the customers choose for your company and its products, which is after all the most ideal environment for new orders!