BUSINESS insights

Have you called into your own business lately?

Think your own business has an effective inbound call customer service strategy? Before you answer too quickly, consider this story of "voicemail hell," found in an article from the San Francisco Chronicle[1].

The author of the story was trying to obtain one of the latest iPads for his father, shortly after the device's release. After listening to a voicemail message extolling the virtues of the new iPad, he could find no option to dial to actually confirm that the iPads were in-stock. At the end of the message was the ubiquitous, "for all other questions, press 5." Upon pressing 5, *the entire voicemail message started over from the beginning*. After pressing 5 again, the message changed to inform the caller that all customer service representatives were currently busy. When he finally reached a live person, the caller was informed that the new iPads were indeed not in stock.

How could a company as large as Apple deliver such a poor customer service experience? Perhaps because they are not regularly calling into their own business. It can be shocking how many companies do not employ this simple tactic to make sure that their customer's needs are properly addressed. By calling into your own business, you can view your company as your customer does and correct the situations that will drive that customer into the arms of a competitor.

Try calling into your Sales or A/R departments. These departments drive the revenue growth for most organizations — and customers typically have the lowest patience level with long hold times or poor customer service when dealing with these departments. If calling into one of these areas results in a positive experience, you've gone a long way towards improving the overall customer relationship. If, however, you leave the call even mildly frustrated…think about how your customer feels.

Automated Attendant Tips

1. Make the salutation brief. No one likes to listen to 15 minutes of instructions just to learn the choice they wanted was the first option.

2. Alert users they can immediately dial an extension, then offer other options. Likewise, print business cards with extension numbers. This allows users who are familiar with the system to immediately dial to the extension. This can save your business money on toll-free charges and helps reduce the frustration level of callers who hate to interact with automated attendant.

3. Always give callers the option to make a keypress to speak with a live operator. This makes the system foolproof and, again, reduces the frustration level of callers who can't tolerate automated attendant. Make sure customers then speak to a live operator! Don't allow these transfers to go to a mailbox. Instead route them to a hunt group of several extensions to make sure someone answers the call, or send

insights

BUSINESS

them to an extension that is really a bell on the wall to
alert all that an incoming call needs to be answered.
Warning: If the first option on the menu is to press 0 to speak
with an operator, be prepared that the majority of your callers will
bypass the automated attendant and speak with an operator. This will greatly
reduce the benefits of having an automated attendant.

4. Keep the options to a minimum! If many departments must be listed, make logical use of
simple sub-menus. If the accounting department insists upon 4 options, be sure these are listed
on a sub-menu and not all on the main menu. The object is to keep things simple for callers. (If
supported by your phone system, consider special DID numbers for larger departments so callers will
be directed to a 'main menu' greeting for the desired department.)

5. Give callers a keypress to repeat the instructions. It's very easy to miss the option you want.

6. Schedule open and closed salutations. Callers need to know that the business is closed and transferring to an
extension will probably not result in the call being answered. Unless your business is large, it is probably not
necessary to offer a full set of menu options from the closed salutation. It is more expeditious to offer a one-
touch keypress to transfer to "company mailbox" and then have a receptionist retrieve messages the next day
and transfer to the appropriate person. Also offer callers keypresses to transfer to audiotext information of
frequently asked questions such as fax number, directions to the office, hours of operation, current shipping
schedules, sales specials, etc.

7. Alert callers prior to the auto attendant installation that your company will be installing the system.

The key is to keep things as simple as possible for your customers and always allow for a live person option.
Your Ideacom Network telecom partner is an expert at consulting and setting up your automated attendant.
Contact them today for an evaluation and recommendations on how to serve your customers better using an
automated attendant.

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[1] Henry Blodget, "My Apple Customer-Service Horror Story," San Francisco Chronicle, provided by Business Insider, (May 25, 2010),
http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/g/a/2010/05/25/businessinsider-henry-blodget-my-apple-customer-service-horror-story-2010-5.DTL

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