

Consumers only want to call once.

First call resolution the greatest measure of customer satisfaction

Johannesburg, South Africa, 2 July 2008 - Organisations need to place more emphasis on maintaining customer satisfaction in order to ensure that they retain good customer service. This means improving the way contact centre agents handle calls and reducing the need for customers to call more than once to resolve an issue.

This was the key message from Craig Gibson, managing director of Merchants, the contact centre division of Dimension Data, as he spoke at the launch of the annual Global Contact Centre Benchmarking Report for 2008.

The Report, which includes survey results from 300 contact centres from across 36 countries on five continents, revealed that 38% of contact centre managers polled believe that a contact centre agent's ability to resolve a query during the first call is the most important factor in service improvement, while 74% rated it in their top three.

The time that a customer waits before the call is answered had the second greatest impact on service improvement with 47% of respondents ranking it in their top three.

'Agent communication and service skills' was ranked third with 43% of respondents including this in their top three improvement indicators.

"For too long, contact centres have had the unfavourable reputation of not being able to deliver superior customer service, with consumers often dreading the thought of having to call contact centres for fear of long waits, on hold or incompetent or disempowered agents," Gibson says.

"This hinges off the fact that contact centres have not put much emphasis on measuring the voice of the customer – proactively asking if the customers' needs were fulfilled and if their calls were resolved to their satisfaction."

As a result, many of the traditional metrics used to measure quality assurance in a contact centre have been challenged – changing contact centre managers' view of the way a contact centre performs.

According to the report, 90% of contact centres still rely on the standard efficiency metrics such as 'abandon rates' to measure performance, while only 63% use 'first call resolution' as a performance target.

"It's a lot more valuable to an organisation to measure customer satisfaction based on the number of calls fielded and successfully closed as opposed to the number of callers who just gave up and never received a satisfactory resolution to their call," Gibson says.

"In many cases, measuring 'abandon rate' is an exercise in futility because the damage may already have been done and those customers who did give

up holding on for an agent would have taken their business to a competitor. Losing customers not only means a loss of guaranteed on-going revenue, but also the opportunity to cross- or up-sell products or services.”

The only key performance indicator that effectively addresses the gap in delivering good customer service is first call resolution and focussing on number of resolutions instead of number of calls handled.

Percentage of calls handled in a predetermined number of seconds and percentage of calls handled versus number of calls offered, both drive the wrong internal behaviours that add no face value to the customer.

Another interesting finding of the report, which hinges off the need to drive first call resolution, reveals that if callers’ queries are completely resolved - and to their satisfaction - the waiting time in the automated queue becomes almost irrelevant.

Gibson says that the contact centre industry can learn a lot from the findings of the report, especially with regard to what consumers expect in the way of good customer service.

“It’s almost illogical that the industry has only woken up to these realities now,” he says. “But it has already been proven that, with the basic service components firmly in place, customer service experiences improve exponentially, which contributes positively to client retention, the reduction of costs (through reduced repeat calls) and improved revenue generation.”

For further information please contact:

Vanda Dickson, Marketing & Strategy Development, Merchants

Tel: +27 11 575 2479

Email: vanda.dickson@za.didata.com

Lee-Anne Poon, Tribeca Public Relations

Tel: +27 11 208 5500

Email: lee-annep@tribecapr.co.za