



Nancy Lewis - Executive Vice President, Client Services, Virtual-Agent Services On Customer Satisfaction

Do you believe the "industry" is doing a better job at keeping customers satisfied compared to say 5 years ago?

The industry as a whole is focusing on the customer care function through identifying the customer's needs and looking for the necessary enhancements to provide executives with feedback from their customers in order to proactively meet those needs. We keep pushing the vendors of CRM systems, staff planning and forecasting, automated reporting, web based programs for communication, VoIP, online chat, CTI and all for the best interest of our customers. In this respect, we are doing a better job at keeping customers satisfied. The remaining problem, however, that has been consistent over the last the five years and even longer is available workforce. All too often companies locate their centers in areas where there is a steady demand for human resources and the battle for labor results in higher costs and turnover. This attrition results in a workforce where agents lack experience and ongoing training is required in order to enhance their skills so that the company can take customer service excellence to the next level.



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All of this results in desperate attempts to follow the geographical trends in order to solve our labor problems when, in actuality, practitioners should be looking for a more comprehensive solution.

What do you view as the biggest area for improvement in the industry when looking at customer satisfaction?

As the customer care industry evolves, we are seeing a need to transition from a reactive environment to that of a proactive focus where the customer's needs are anticipated and the solutions are made available in order to enhance the service. Companies that include continuous process improvement in their corporate vision understand that this will be an important step in their goals for the future.

What 3 tips would you give a contact center manager looking at implementing customer satisfaction measures for the first time?

- Clearly identify who the customer(s) are in your environment and accurately communicate your findings through all levels within your company.
- Understand the goals of your customers and their expectations of your company. Set realistic goals that can be accomplished in a progressive nature so that you have short term, intermediate, and long term action items to accomplish. Performance planning is a very important step in your quality assurance program; you will find that your customers will be enthusiastic advocates as the outcome will only enhance their experience.
- Continuous process improvement should always be used to measure how you are doing. Set key performance indicators (KPIs) that will assist you in watching your efforts improve and, vice versa, trigger an intervention should they fall behind. A sound reporting structure of your KPIs will prove to be your best asset when evaluating your customer satisfaction.

Which of the following do you feel has the greatest impact on customer service improvements: people, process, or technology and why?

Customer service providers in any business sector must start with a solid workforce that has been screened for customer service excellence. The lack of soft skills to nurture the company's goals of taking customer excellence to the next level will in itself diminish the success of all other initiatives. Most companies today have strong quality assurance programs which also support continuous improvement, but policies alone will not develop an agent environment that achieves the high levels of customer service excellence that are expected today. The representatives on the front line, the very same people that have the responsibility of meeting your customers for the first time, must have a strong and natural ability to look after your customers and have the desire to go that extra mile you require. A corporate focus to improve process, provide enhanced performance software, or the best technology with all the bells and whistles that are available today, will not help you if you don't have the right people answering your phones.

Thinking realistically, do you believe customer service excellence is an attainable goal for most organizations?

Being that we are in the business of customer satisfaction, excellence should be the focus for every company in our industry. The key to reach this goal is for each company to understand its customers and their specific needs so that you can proactively cater to those requirements. If a company requires outside assistance, there are many good organizations whose core competency is to assist with quality assurance metrics ensuring they are being met and that there is a clear understanding of each metric. This provides an unbiased view of the organizations progress at all levels. With realistic goals, a plan for attaining those results, and company wide communication of that plan, customer service excellence is most definitely attainable, keeping in mind that the road may be longer for some companies depending on the level of customer satisfaction reached today.

About Nancy Lewis :

Nancy Lewis is the Executive Vice President of Client Services for Virtual-Agent Services and is responsible for all client relations. Nancy has been with VAS since its incorporation in 1999 and led the implementation of the quality assurance program which has contributed to great success of the organization.

About Virtual-Agent Services :

Virtual-Agent Services is a provider of contact center solutions for today's demanding customer care industry. Providing a variety of support options including inbound sales and customer service, customer account maintenance, credit management and reservations, VAS services a variety of industries and high profile clients.