

Have You Tested How Customers Interact with Your Phones?

It's shocking how many businesses do not test the effectiveness of their phone system in a real-world, real-time environment. An organization should plot how incoming calls happen, and how customers are interacting with the system. This strategy can enable you to recognize blind spots and ensure your phone platform gives the right first impression to keep your customers coming back for more.

Try this experiment: Call into your own business as if you were a customer. Start with a common question on your product or service, and see how long it takes you to get it answered. How long were you on hold? How many times were you transferred, and what was the time between transfers? How were the call quality and the overall experience?

Vocal Laboratories points out five reasons why companies do not understand customer's demands and fail to provide a quality experience when the customer calls the business:¹

1. Failing to ask the customers their opinion on the call experience
2. Failing to gather meaningful call data on the business — such as time-on-hold, abandonment rate, IVR containment rate, etc.
3. Failing to gather enough data that's statistically significant
4. Failing to understand the data in a way that drives meaningful decisions
5. Failing to use the data effectively

Vocalabs points out that while it may be easy to identify a problem that 20% of callers are experiencing, finding a problem that only 1% of customers experience can be a challenge. But that 1% can have a real impact on operational costs, as enabling 1% more customers to finish their tasks in a self-service system could save an organization tens of thousands per month in a high volume call center environment.²

Visibility is Critical

Makes sure your phone platform has the proper foundation to collect and share data. You should have LAN access with Ethernet capability. The system should be able to output data streams onto an Ethernet port, including SMDR (Station Messaging Detail Recording), CSTA (if using a PBX platform) or TAPI (if using an IP-based platform). Depending on the applications used, a company can customize their system to identify customer demographics through caller ID, special advertising or promotional codes and even voice recognition systems. This data can be used in combination with CRM platforms to customize staffing levels, adjust call flow planning, and even adjust the types of responses customers receive when they call. But you must make sure all customer databases are integrated properly. Nothing is more frustrating to a customer than entering their unique customer code, getting transferred to a different call center, and then being asked to provide that same information again, and again.



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Call Routing

If you link an IVR application to customer data, calls can be routed to a call center group or individual work station. These routing decisions will be based on the database lookup of a caller ID number. Based on the incoming caller ID, a screen pop-up can be generated on the desktop of the station where the call is routed. This pop-up can include vital customer information to prepare the customer service representative for the call. The caller's ID and information can stay with the call through multiple call transfers across the organization. And if the system logs an abandoned call, a customer service representative can pull up that customer's record and call that individual back as soon as possible.

Caller Empowerment

Phone technology can deploy several strategies to make customers feel empowered rather than frustrated when they call your business. Presence Management can speed the time it takes for a caller to find the resource they are looking for. But often there is hold-time that cannot be avoided. That's why your system should be configured to make your customer feel like they can control what happens next. The caller can be given the option to wait for their call to go through, or they can be directed to automated information that may address their need. The option to go to voicemail should also be present if the customer simply cannot spend time on the phone. By presenting the caller with options other than wait or hang up, you can build up a customer's patience level.

Every Business Should Improve the Caller Experience

You may think that such functionality is only available through large call centers. But the reality is that all of this capability can be deployed even to a small-to-medium business. You just need to work with a vendor who has the latest technology to accommodate your needs. By working with such a vendor, you can build out a true customer loyalty strategy designed around building relationships in the long term.

Develop a profile of your customers, identify the issues they are having with your system, and deploy new technology to correct those issues and improve the caller experience. Then call back into your own business. We think you'll like what you hear.

¹ Peter Leppik and David Leppik, "Gourmet Customer Service: A Scientific Approach to Improving the Caller Experience," Vocal Laboratories, (2005), <http://www.vocalabs.com/sites/default/files/Chapter1.pdf>

² Peter Leppik and David Leppik, "Gourmet Customer Service: A Scientific Approach to Improving the Caller Experience," Vocal Laboratories, (2005), <http://www.vocalabs.com/sites/default/files/AppendixA.pdf>



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