



## VIEWPOINT

### GIVE ME THAT OLD TIME, REAL RELATIONSHIP

Remember the good old days when you would deal with the same person each time you called the telco with a problem – your accounts receivable clerk? That person had a vested interest in resolving the problem, not just to keep his call handling record up to par, but because he would probably have to face the customer's anger if it wasn't dealt with swiftly. Carl Wright reminisces over a time when customer service included business relationships with CSRs, highlighting the benefits of such an approach.

I moved to a small town a couple of years ago. I've been pleased and shocked by becoming recognised, having become a 'regular' at different businesses in town. They've come to know me. Some even know what I want before I speak. It's a pleasure – I love that feeling of being a regular. It makes me want to spend my money with these businesses.

I don't get that feeling when dealing with my cable company, my telephone company, or my wireless phone company though. I end up dealing with a mish-mash of people. Some are good listeners and work to solve my problems, while others are clearly undertrained for the work they perform. None of them make me feel good. None of them recognise me or remember the problems that I've had with their company's services. What I don't understand is, why don't they?

Firstly, I blame the call centre. It treats Customer Service Representatives (CSRs) and customers as interchangeable parts in a 'customer service machine.' This leaves me feeling anonymous and isn't good for the CSR either. Such anonymous treatment encourages a 'CSR surfing' technique where the customer phones the call centre to ask for something repeatedly until they find a customer service representative capable of providing what is required.

I want the call centre to revive an equivalent to the old relationship between a range of phone numbers and a specific CSR. Either by gathering the caller ID and associating it with a customer account or by asking for the account information, they will forward me to the person who owns my account.

#### Strong bond

Similar to the relationship between a person and their hairdresser, for example, there is a strong bond that endures when people

provide a personalised service. I've seen the same barber for more than twenty years. I've moved further away, but I still drive to him for a haircut. As a customer I want a relationship with a person at my service provider that will help me solve my problems and use the service well. Having someone at the company that has my interests at heart makes this happen.

Many times I've called my Internet Service Provider and spent thirty to sixty minutes with them in order to solve a problem. I get to know the person, and they develop an idea of who I am. But then the next time I call with a problem I get someone entirely new. All that time spent building a relationship, developing an understanding of what I can expect, and constructing an overall rapport was wasted.

I want this situation fixed and call centres are in a position to do so. To solve the problem, start building relationship information and using it to route callers to people that they know. Instead of just routing to the first available agent, I want the agent with the most rapport. Perhaps after each call is finished I can be automatically polled to learn if I'd like to be routed to that agent again. If I say 'yes' to the automated poll, I want the person offered to me again in the future. If they aren't available, I want the option of having them call me when they are available.

#### Obvious benefits

So why should service providers do this for me? The answer is simple – to save money and increase customer lifetime value by reducing churn. Staff turnover and training costs would also potentially be reduced. Another benefit of changing the way in which the CSR relates to customers is the improvement in the life of the CSR. The CSR become more like the barber or hairdresser who has a

life-long relationship with their customers. Leaving their customers to go to another job requires leaving all the people they've come to know and who respect them. Customers that keep coming back to you respect you.

If I called my 'regular' CSR to get help, I wouldn't be surprised when they suggest a different rate plan to help me save on my bill. They will tell me that the phone that I was using with my cellular carrier has developed a bad reputation and I may be happier with a different one. If they were my ISP, they would have known that the cable modem that I'd been using for more than a year has a history of problems that explains the poor throughput that I'd been receiving and the problems maintaining a connection with their email server. These are all things that today's CSR is expected to do, but do they have the motivation when they are supposed to manage a certain number of calls each day? My relationship with them gives them the motivation to help me and reduces churn caused by dissatisfaction.

Imagine the day when service provider management is worried about customers leaving when the competition recruits their top CSRs away. What a reversal of status!

I want to know when I can develop a relationship with my service provider. Developing a relationship with my service provider is developing a relationship with a person at my provider. When am I going to get that person 'who knows my name'?

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