

## Expectations Key to Customer Satisfaction, Not Technology

The rush to multi-channel customer contact centres and on-line self service may have failed to deliver what really matters to customers. In a recent survey conducted by FrontRange Solutions among 200 sales, marketing and IT managers, and managing directors, just 32 per cent said they had implemented a customer contact centre or single point of contact for customers.

This is despite the fact that 92 per cent said that what was important to the delivery of customer service was rapid and accurate responses, while 86 per cent said motivated agents were important. Other key features were access to a caller's history together with a good telephone manner (see Table 1).

**Table 1 – Important factors in delivering customer service**

	(% agreeing)
Rapid response times	92
Accurate responses	92
Motivated support agents	86
Telephone manner	84
Access to previous call history	80
Multi-channel support	68

(Source: FrontRange Solutions)

By failing to provide a quick and personal response, or concentrating on a multi-channel presence, companies are risking a serious hit on their customer satisfaction. The focus on technological solutions could be diverting their attention from the important issue of how to drive up customer satisfaction.

"For the last five years, the call centre industry has been forcing new technologies down people's necks. The view is that you must have a knowledge base, online and customer self-help tools. The things customers really want are somebody on the phone, quickly, and a fast resolution of their problems," says Alistair Trower, product marketing manager at FrontRange Solutions.

"That doesn't dovetail with self-help and all the other applications being pushed by the industry. The picture of what customers want has been switched to the cost-to-serve or automated service – those are being used as buy-in tools," he says.

Among those surveyed, 95 per cent agreed that customer satisfaction is a strategic tool in their business. Further, 89 per cent agree that customers have become more demanding over the last 12 months. In recognising these two issues, companies are then coming to the wrong conclusions about how to fulfil their customers' demands.

"The key to customer knowledge is that it has got to be used by the people providing the response. It is massively important within the contact centre, but it is not as important to get it out to the end user or customer. They want an immediate response and somebody else to fix the problem," says Trower.

Although technology may have hidden the real drivers of customer satisfaction, there are other issues. For example, 88 per cent said that the ability to manage customer expectations was an important function of the contact centre (see Table 2).

Many call centres handle this the wrong way by telling callers that the centre is busy and asking them to call back. "Don't say there is a back log, tell the customer when you can handle them and then they will react better because you have set the expectation," says Trower.

If the company is experiencing a lot of service problems with the same product, for example, telling callers via an automated response will make them realise that there is a class problem. "If you say it will take six months to fix and then you fix it in four, the customer is happy because you have exceeded their expectations," he says.

The survey also showed that there is a growing recognition of the importance of being able to analyse call patterns and service requests, together with access to information on existing fixes and solutions. "It is about keeping the customer updated, setting expectations at the beginning of the dialogue, and staying close to the customer," says Trower.

**Table 2 – Important functions in a successful support centre**

	<b>(% agreeing)</b>
The ability to manage customer expectations	88
Access to knowledge bases	86
Reliable technology to log and report on requests for service	85
Reporting facilities	72
Access to support out of office hours	67
The ability to manage service level agreements	65

(Source: FrontRange Solutions)