White Paper: 7 Key Steps to Achieving Customer Service Excellence in the Service Industry

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Over the last few years we have seen major change in nature of our customers; they are now expecting, and demanding, much more from customer service. In fact, nearly 70% of customers will leave a business if they don’t receive the customer service they expect.

Customers are now demanding quicker response times, more visibility, more control and much more knowledge when speaking to the customer service team. Alongside this, with the growth of mobile devices and the rise of generation Y, customers are now wanting to communicate with a business across more channels than ever and are expecting a consistent level of customer service across social media, web chat, messaging and email.

Everyone knows that today’s customers are better connected and better informed and these factors mean it is far harder for service businesses to retain customers and engender loyalty. It is therefore important to understand what customers expect from service delivery and how they can adapt their processes, technology and people to improve service delivery excellence.

This paper will analyse what factors influence customer perception of the quality of service delivered, how we measure it and ways service business can improve service delivery.

1. Successfully measuring service quality to improve performance
2. Providing a consistent level of customer experience across all channels
3. Boosting employee knowledge through strategic knowledge sharing
4. Giving the customer more control with self-service technology
5. Motivate and train your technicians to go beyond basic repair
6. Upskill help desk resource to provide remote service
7. Stay one step ahead of the customer with proactive maintenance
1. Successfully measuring service quality to continually improve customer service

Increasingly businesses are adopting analytics to gain deeper insight into operational performance and customer behaviour to improve the customer experience. However it is reported that only 20% of organisations believe they have the technology and skills to gather the necessary insights to effectively measure performance.

Big Data is a buzz word making its rounds across a variety of industries and the field service sector is no exception. Over the last 10 years, field service organisations have become overwhelmed by the relentless flow of information coming in from multiple sources, in various formats and through an array of tools. This is being made worse by modern technology, where the ability to over-analyse things can also haemorrhage good and clear decision making and change.

The major challenge businesses are facing is not only how to make sense of the massive amounts of data they collect, but knowing what they need to be measuring in order to improve the customer experience, as well as operational efficiencies.

Traditionally, in the service industry, operational KPIs such as service response times, first time fix rate and first call/fix resolution are used to measure customer satisfaction. However the problem is that these operational measures only represent part of the overall picture of service delivery. When looking to improve the service quality, organisations need to not only take into consideration operational efficiencies, but also measure factors that are important to the customer and reflect their expectations of good service delivery such as those listed below:

**Customer Satisfaction** - Many companies already measure customer satisfaction to some extent, but the problem is making sense of this data and how to act on it to ensure continual improvement. Whilst being able to gain high-level view of customer satisfaction quickly and easily by measuring key metrics in parallel with customer retention and spend, businesses need to understand the qualitative detail to really understand the customer feedback and be able to continuously improve the customer experience. Customer focus groups are a good way to measure satisfaction as they allow a business to understand what matters to the customer and gather insightful feedback through discussion and conversation.

**Net Promoter Score** - NPS is a customer satisfaction metric originally put forward by Frederick F. Reichheld of Bain & Company in his 2003 article for the Harvard Business Review, ‘The One Number You Need to Grow” and then expanded on in his 2006 book, The Ultimate Question. The concept is simple – responses to the ‘likely to recommend’ question are divided into three groups: Promoters (rating of 9-10), Passives (7-8) and Detractors (0-6). However, whilst this is a good thing to measure, it only provides evidence of whether your customer service was good or bad, but not why. Net Promoter Score is still a good statistic to measure, however it needs to be used in parallel with other qualitative and quantitative measures to ensure a holistic picture of overall service delivery and customer experience is being achieved.
Customer Effort – We have seen how more and more companies are recognising the need to reduce the amount of effort customers must put in when making contact with an organisation. This can be achieved through managing the customer journey more proactively to ensure they need minimum touch points with an organisation and ensuring the customer is able to receive the same level of customer service through all channels of communication. This can be measured on a 1-5 scale at the end of each customer service enquiry, in order to recognise how much effort customers are putting in to actually reach their desired outcome. Organisations can make use of this data to predict what customer needs, even before those customers are aware of them, continually improving the customer experience.

2. Providing a Consistent Level of Customer Experience Across all Channels

Traditionally the service industry has primarily used the telephone as the main channel for customers to find out the status of their service request. However today’s customers have 24/7 access to an array of channels through their mobile devices and expect to be able to contact a business through their channel of choice. Not only this, but they expect a consistent level of customer experience across these channels.

Whilst many industries such as finance and retail are making use of these channels for customer service, the service industry is slower and potentially more reluctant to introduce further channels to place service requests and other enquiries.

A more consistent, cross-channel customer service can be created by having a solution that can manage multimedia in a single universal queue (including voice, email, click-to-chat, fax, SMS, web and social media), rather than service desk agents having to deal with piecemeal technology and legacy systems that are disparate and complex. All these channels can be placed on the agent’s desktop allowing them to see all required customer details, despite the channel they chose to contact them via.

This multi-channel approach to customer service allows the business to achieve a holistic view of the customer journey and establish their channel of choice which is important when trying to establish a more personalised customer experience. Implementing this type of technology also allows customer service requests to not only be routed to the most appropriate and skilled agent, but also prioritised in terms of customer need, not channel.
3. Equip all Customer facing personnel with full, consistent, up to date knowledge

Knowledge is the key to providing high levels of a personalised customer experience and it is important to share this knowledge across the business and not keep siloed within departments. Although many companies are trying to establish ways of effectively achieving knowledge share, it is common to face difficulties in keeping this knowledge up-to-date and making available to the right person at the right time.

For office based teams, an integrated service desktop can identify the nature of the customer enquiry, either through text analytics identifying key terms or IVR predicting the nature of the call, and route it to an agent, whilst popping all relevant customer details and associated knowledge they may need when answering the enquiry. This knowledge base should include knowledge articles, most common FAQ’s and product information as well as a full log of previous customer complaints, service requests and product purchases. This will allow the service desk agent to access all the information they need at a click of a button and improve first call resolution through improved customer service levels.

It is important for businesses to understand that knowledge sharing needs to go beyond the confinements of the office walls and extend out to the mobile workforce who depend on knowledge sharing just as much with those in the office. As customer facing employees and those who go out to fix problems and meet customers, it is essential for them to be able to access the information they need, when they need it. Mplsystems suggests equipping your mobile workforce with not just a basic app that can receive project details, but also allows them to access all customer information including previous faults, work log, complaints and full access to the knowledge base.

4. Client Self Service and visibility of service status

The customer’s ability to arrange service calls or get status updates with a company is an important element of how a service organisation is viewed by its customers. Given that the role of the consumer has largely changed over recent years due to the consumerisation of technology, customers are now expecting to be able to have more visibility and control when it comes to interacting with a business. So whilst the call centre remains the primary channel of communication, businesses need to consider self-service technology to keep up with customer demand.

Online portals are currently the most used self-service channel within the service industry, however the functionality of these portals is still quite limited and often do not provide the customer with the control they require. One of the main problems that is limiting self-service portals is the lack of integration with existing business technology such as scheduling systems and field service engineer’s mobile device technology.
Organisations need to ensure that when implementing self-service portals, they are integrating them to all necessary back office systems to allow customers to not only access basic information such as billing, service requests or appointment booking but also allow them to make payments, amend or cancel appointments or have real-time updates of their service delivery without human interaction.

Another key customer self-service technology that is emerging in the industry is customer service apps. Whilst mobile apps are helping transform operational efficiency for field workers, the extension of this technology to customers is still very limited. Only 5% of field service organisations currently offer their customers mobile apps as a communication channel into the service desk, compared to up to 60% in other industries. With the rise of generation Y and the increasing reliance on mobile devices, organisations need to ensure they are offering their customers access to this low cost customer service channel, that will not only improve the customer by allowing them to carry out all of the tasks they need through a platform that is familiar and easy for them.

GPS technology can further simplify service requests such as reporting a fault by identifying where the client is, cross-referencing location against asset management systems and common faults and pre-populate required fields with data. This significantly reduces data entry for the customer and allows them to easily log a job request in one easy step, rather than a complex process.
5. Motivate and train your technicians to go beyond basic repair

The field based engineers of your organisation are not just the ones who fix, prevent or manage customer requirements, they become the face of the business and one of the only employees from your business that the customers sees. With this in mind, it is important to ensure the business is getting the most out of their remote workforce by training them in not only providing the best repair and maintenance service, but also by improving their soft skills in order to successfully communicate, listen and train customers on the products and maintenance best practice.

By boosting your engineers skill set, a business is able to transform their field based engineers from a cost centre in to a product centre, by running training courses on soft skills. This will help engineers to actively look for opportunities to increase revenues by quoting for additional products, upgrade legacy products and order new parts or products. The customer experience is increased by allowing them to communicate with a team member face to face, therefore alleviating the need to call the service desk and reduce further call outs by solving more than one problem during each visit.

To successfully achieve this, the organisation needs to equip field based workers with the tools they need to drive sales and boost the customer experience when visiting customer sites. Therefore businesses need to ensure that their field workers are equipped with mobile apps that allows them to not only receive basic project information, but also allows them to access accounts systems for billing, the sales platform for quoting and parts ordering whilst at a customer site.

6. Increase help desk productivity with technical training and automation

Whilst training your engineers to carry out additional tasks such as quoting and ordering, it is also important to ensure that those on the service desk are also doing as much as they can to help improve the customer experience. The traditional role of the service desk is to log customer requests and schedule them for the next available or most skilled engineer to go out and visit the customer. However, what if the service desk could provide some level of expertise in trying to find out more about the service request to better inform and equip the engineers and on some occasions even help solve the customers problem remotely, over the phone?

Training the service desk agents with a level of technical understanding can significantly improve the customer experience, providing customers with instant advice and solutions on the phone meaning they do not have to wait for an engineer to come and visit their site. This also has a positive impact on the business as they are ensuring their engineers are only visiting the customers that have more complex/urgent service requests, saving them both time and money.
As help desk staff will then be spending more time answering more complex customer enquiries, businesses can divert less complex customer enquiries to lower cost channels such as online portals or self-service mobile apps. If an organisation experiences high volumes of text based customer enquiries, new technology such as text analytics can help better manage these enquiries through automated responses, as in some industries up to 60% of enquiries are straightforward requests that do not need human interaction at all.

7. Stay one step ahead of the customer with proactive maintenance

The amount of reactive service requests coming in to an organisation can cause complexity for scheduling as well as effecting engineer availability, parts ordering and the amount of time it takes for the problem to be fixed. To avoid the amount of reactive jobs being received, businesses should implement a strategy to track performance of components and analyse common faults in order to predict when maintenance will be needed. This means that when an engineer is on site they are able to see, through their mobile app, when the next planned job is and whether it is more beneficial to carry out the maintenance whilst on site to avoid repeat visits. This approach will help better manage the scheduling of engineers work, as well as the customer experiencing less products faults.

The internet of things will also have a huge impact on service delivery and although still somewhat in its infancy, will soon be able to transform the industry. The internet of things is defined as “the network of physical objects that contain embedded technology to communicate and sense or interact with their internal stats or the external environment.” In more simple terms, this means that products and other physical objects that may need maintenance will soon be able to alert the organisation themselves when they need some sort of service attention. This could be a simple element such as a change of battery or lighting, or a more complex internal issue that needs managing as a matter of urgency. This results in repair and maintenance organisations being able to take out the guess work in proactive maintenance, significantly reduces the amount of calls from customers in to the service desk and provides a higher level of customer service through avoiding product down time or major faults occurring.