Customer Service is going through a rapid evolution. Until recently many customer service departments were inwardly focused and viewed as an unnecessary cost of doing business, and today the transition is towards delivering an amazing customer experience as a key differentiator that affects the bottom line.

Much of the management, metrics and language of contact centres of the past was around trying to offer ‘customer service’ for as little cost as possible:

- Agents: The industry term for people delivering customer service is only one step above ‘cogs’
- Average Handle Time: Let’s get these customers off the phone as quickly as possible
- Call Deflection: Let’s see if we can prevent these customers calling us

In this post we’ll focus on ‘call deflection’ a poor term to describe something that can add real value to your customers as well as your bottom line.

Reducing inbound calls

From the traditional internally focused viewpoint call deflection is aimed at reducing the number of inbound calls to the contact centre. A reduced number of calls might mean you could spend longer on the phone to each customer, or more likely that you can reduce the number of advisors you need to employ to answer them.

The issue with this internal view is that the phrase ‘call deflection’ quickly de-humanises the interaction and can encourage you to design obstacle course call plans that make it almost impossible to reach a human:

- Phone numbers are hidden on the Contact Us page
- While you are waiting “Did you know our website……”
- “If you are calling about a recent order please wait 3 days before calling....”
- “We are unable to answer queries without an order number.” followed by a hangup.

As a customer these messages can come over as unwelcoming and unfriendly. At the point when I’ve picked up the phone it is because I want to speak to someone!
Improved Customer Self-Serve

A better route to the same result is to focus less on call deflection and more on getting your customers the answer to their question faster whilst at the same time ensuring that your phone numbers are clearly visible and that the phone experience doesn’t turn people off – “Are you absolutely sure you want us to spend money having someone answer your call?” is what it sounds like to your customers!

Route cause analysis

Your first step is to be absolutely clear why your customers are calling. In some cases customers have to speak with you, but in many cases calls are avoidable. We spoke with one company recently who had a high number of elderly customers who struggled with case sensitivity in their web passwords. By removing case sensitivity their call volume fell significantly. This is the friendly face of call deflection – great for the customer and great for your business.

Empathise with your customer

Now you know the most common reasons that your customers are calling you try and empathise with them and imagine what they are trying to do at the time that they call you. Are they trying to return an order, or login to their account, or track a delivery?

Go onto your website and social networks and imagine what your customer might be looking for – “Trying to track a delivery? Visit our online tracker!” could be added prominently to your website or social profiles.

Suggest answers on your contact us page

Once your customer has decided they decided they want to speak to someone you still have an opportunity to support them by anticipating their question. List your most common questions on the page, and solutions like Desk.com and Zendesk have auto suggestion features as your customer types in their query.

It is important to remember that self-serve is the secondary purpose of your Contact Us page – not the primary. Do not fall into the trap of minimising or hiding your phone number. As was reported in a survey earlier this year customers rated easier access to phone numbers as the number one thing companies could do to improve their customer service.

Make the phone experience amazing

If your customer has not been able to self-serve and does then pick up the phone then make the experience a pleasure. Recently I heard someone refer to FCR in the contact centre now meaning Fourth Contact Resolution – after the website, social networks and forums. Do not welcome your caller with reminders about the channels they have probably just been trying to use.

Summary
Removing the phrase ‘call deflection’ makes it easier to focus on your customer’s needs instead of your own. You end up with a better result – fewer inbound calls and happier customers who have been able to get the answer they needed at the point when they needed it.

Do you still use the term ‘call deflection’? Has a change in terminology changed the culture in your contact centre? We’d love to hear your thoughts here on the blog!

Please fill out the form and we will be in touch with you shortly.

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