More Staff or **More Efficient** Staff?

By Eric Brown, Aptean

I n years past, businesses could rely on low customer churn because it was both inconvenient and difficult to switch suppliers or providers, but now it's a relatively pain-free process. This has become particularly apparent in free markets; the ecommerce powerhouses—because of their quick turnaround and competitive prices—often have the competitive advantage.

How a business interacts with its customers is a huge differentiator when it comes to customer loyalty and retention. Customers don't necessarily want to switch providers, but if they feel that inadequate customer service is forcing their hand, they won't hesitate, and they certainly won't be coming back.

A business's frontline staff is the first and the best opportunity to either reverse a negative situation or build upon a good one. Because of this, it's imperative to invest in the success of your customer-facing employees. Your staff needs to be operating at a level that can both handle the demand and satisfy customer inquiries effectively in order to reduce churn and keep customers loyal.

According to Invesp, **it can be five times more costly to gain a new customer than it is to retain an existing one.** Additionally, OutboundEngine says **increasing customer retention by a mere 5% can increase profits anywhere from 25% to 95%.** It really is that dramatic, which is why we encourage you to make every experience a valuable one for your customers, and properly training your employees to ensure the best customer service and care is vital to this.

The Complaint Heard Around the World

The challenge of providing satisfactory customer service is exacerbated by the evolving digital landscape. Now, essentially, it dictates brand reputation.

Customer service departments are no longer a 9 to 5 operation; many are already running 24/7. Similarly, customer service now affects every aspect of the enterprise rather than a single department. The nature by which customers get the attention of their service providers has also never been more broad or varied.

Evidence of poor customer service no longer dies out once the news has made its rounds at the coffee shop, office, or gym—it lives on in the virtual world as a permanent reminder. Customers tend to gravitate toward digital platforms with their complaints, as it provokes a quick and public response from the company.

These new platforms have presented challenges for businesses and have dramatically increased the reliance on their complaints management staff. If customer service representatives don't have adequate training or resources to effectively handle customer interaction across several different channels, it could lead to a serious breakdown in customer trust, and consequently, loyalty.

As businesses have adapted to these developments, expectations have risen. Consumers want answers quickly. They want immediate access to real people, and they want them to be aware of their situation and have solutions tailored to their requests. Apologies and empathy may pacify the customer in the short term, but it doesn't solve the problem.

To ensure that your customers are truly content, those skills need to be complemented with expertise and proactivity. That's what the customer ultimately wants; they want to know their concern is being addressed and that this problem will not happen again. Your customer service staff needs to be empowered with enough support to make their jobs as seamless and efficient as possible while also providing exemplary service to customers.

More customer service staff does not necessarily fulfill customer expectations. More informed, more efficient staff—that is the answer.

Embracing Technology to Drive Efficiency

With this digital age comes the need for customer service staff to be trained and equipped to keep customers happy across the ever-expanding list of communication channels.

They receive queries via call, website forum, comment card, email, social media, letter, fax, or face-to-face inquiry. Though your staff may not immediately know the best resolution path, it does not mean that they cannot communicate assurances and information with empathy to the customer. You want your customers to know that you're doing everything you can to help them in a timely, effective manner.

By utilizing holistic complaints management software (CMS), your frontline staff—as well as all departments in your business—will experience considerable benefits. A CMS truly integrates the whole setup into a manageable and easily accessible format.

It gives staff the ability to provide customers with instant updates, rather than making them wait for an answer. If the problem cannot be solved instantly, the software can streamline the redirection of a customer complaint to the right department or person. Companywide system updates within the solution can provide clarity on how similar

issues were resolved, and resolution information captured at first point of contact is logged, so the customer need not wait for an answer that already exists.

For large companies whose customer service teams are spread far and wide, streamlined, internal communication is vital in driving complaints handling efficiency. All the data is centrally located in one convenient, easy-to-access location.

Short-Term Action for Long-Term Prosperity

Investing in customer service gives businesses a competitive edge, but simply hiring more staff is not the solution to improving complaint-handling efficiency. In fact, adding more components to an already inefficient system will only go toward making things more difficult.

The key is to identify ways to make staff more efficient. Implementing an interconnected software system that allows greater detail to be captured, limited disruption of the customer-facing experience, root cause analysis, social media monitoring, and so much more is what creates these efficiencies.

There is no one-size-fits-all solution, but enhancing staff capabilities through complaint-handling reform does not have to be costly, particularly in the context of the long-term gains of doing so. By working with complaint-handling management experts to tailor software infrastructure that improves frontline customer interaction, businesses will gain customers' trust—and acquire their loyalty for years to come.

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For over a decade **Eric Brown** *has been helping Aptean Respond customers extract maximum value from their Respond investment. Eric has seen the complaints management industry evolve over the decade to one that is intrinsic in creating customer advocates, playing a key role in customer experience programs, and ensuring operational efficiency in the complaints and feedback management operation. Today's complaints and feedback management operations are fundamental in customer recovery, and Eric is passionate about challenging the status quo to ensure representations at all levels within an organization.*

Aptean Respond can help you manage customer feedback and complaints from inception to completion so that your team can focus more on delivering value to the customer. To learn more about how Aptean Respond can help, email us at info@aptean.com. **CRM**