



heroes of customer service



Each day they rescue ordinary citizens from the clutches of inconvenience, save time for stressed out customers, and leap potential problems in a single bound. Upholding the values of politeness, friendliness and loyalty, every one of them goes beyond the call of duty. It's time to meet the heroes of customer service...



Power struggle: the uneasy relationship between customers and companies is a difficult one to manage. **p04**



Water feature: find out how Anglian Water sets the bar for utility firms when it comes to customer service. **p12**



Winning ways: do you offer excellent service? If so, it's time you were recognised by the nation for your efforts. **p13**



United Business Media





BRINGING YOUR BRAND ALIVE

Great customer service can't come out of a box. It depends on the talent and commitment of those who engage with customers every day.

A great customer service experience begins in the eye of the beholder and springs from the customer's derived expectations to a brand promise. Organisations must stop seeing customer service as being just a well-mannered approach to their customers and seek out more in-depth answers from various parts of the organisation.

The marketing department, the values and vision of the business and the direct feedback from the frontline all hold the key to great service.

For thousands of years, people have bartered and paid for goods and services based on a perceived value and the all important 'promise made at purchase'. This promise is still the backbone of business, brands, customer service and, if managed correctly, should set the foundation of frontline people development.

It is essential to look back to where the customer relationship began - the marketing department - and consider what cues and messages were first sent out to potential customers. This team gives a brand a look, a feel, a personality and most importantly, a promise of a continued relationship with frontline representatives who bring that brand alive. They give a customer management department its identity and an expectation of what a living brand engagement would be like. Living Brands®

We must stop treating frontline people as task-oriented androids and start to see them as intelligent customer management representatives

are all about turning marketing words into living, customer-focused actions.

With this in mind, great customer service cannot come out of a box or an off-the-shelf 'how to' manual. It must be generated from the attitude, culture and personality of an organisation's own brand image. It must be fun and engaging whilst educating delegates in areas such as Emotional Intelligence, NLP and Behavioural Sciences that will be used in both work and home life.

If recruited correctly, every frontline person has the capacity to offer a truly great customer experience. So why don't they? It is simple – we must stop treating them as transactional, task-oriented androids and start to see them as intelligent customer management representatives. They represent the true value of an organisation's brand in their hearts, minds and crucially in the actions they take every day. The motivation and commitment of our frontline people and

ultimately the way in which they engage will make or break a customer's confidence. These highly skilled communication specialists need to have the respect and the insight into the direction of the business and hence see the important part they play in its continued success. Allow them to take pride and be empowered with the responsibility of being the real face and voice of the organisation.

A great customer experience is not rocket science. It begins in the attitude that the frontline has in relation to the businesses they represent. Seeing them in their pure worth as Living Brands® will assist organisations to reach the service levels that are required to secure customer advocacy in 2010 and beyond. Without question there is a particular skill set that is required within individuals in order for them to deliver and build a rapport with customers. However, as more behavioural research supports, the key to great service lies within the belief system and true connection people have to the brand values of the organisation.

Marketing words without actions are meaningless. Moving forward, organisations will be judged on and remembered most for the attitude, actions and promise delivery of their customer facing people.

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Repro and contract publishing by Lyonsdown

www.lyonsdown.co.uk / 020 8349 4363

www.nationalcustomerserviceawards.co.uk

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EVERY DAY HEROISM

The very best customer service workers seem to have magical powers to turn problems into a positive experience. We've all been there: you complain about something to the bored-looking teenager on the till and get increasingly frustrated as they seem less and less interested in you and your issue.

Then suddenly a friendly, professional, well-dressed individual breezes up and asks if everything is ok. You repeat your complaint in a vaguely threatening just-about-to-go-nuclear kind of way. And then the customer service hero goes to work. They listen intently, they immediately apologise (thereby disarming you of any further ammunition), they say yes to your reasonable demands while somehow making you forget about your unreasonable ones, they actually go out of their way to resolve the issue, and then they offer you something for free.

Or how about that time you rang a call centre and they actually solved your problem in one easy step and didn't make you want to pull your hair out? Or the friendly café owner who always remembers your coffee order on your way to work? Or the travel agent who seemed to telepathically know your perfect itinerary and booked it without any fuss?

That is the power of customer service heroes. They simply make life easier. Often, you don't even notice them, but every day they are quietly working away to make everything run smoothly.

And it takes a very special kind of person to become a customer service hero. Sure, they can be trained for the right skills, but they also need to have a real desire to help people, they need to be sympathetic and have a friendly, professional manner.

These people must be celebrated and held up for their amazing abilities. That's why the National Customer Service Awards has been in existence for more than ten years – to make sure customer service gets the recognition it deserves on a national stage.

In this supplement you can meet some of the individuals who have answered the call of duty to make life better for everyone. Customer service heroes, we salute you.

Claudia Hathway
 Editor, Customer Strategy

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Rebuilding trust UK vice president of customer service at American Express Jose Vazquez-Mendez reveals why they are ploughing investment into staff training

Company vs customer: the eternal power struggle

The relationship between organisations and their customers is a complex one, says **Claudia Hathway**, and neither can have it all their own way. Or can they?

What's the aim of most businesses? To make money, of course. More specifically, the aim is to take money from customers in return for goods and services. More customers equals more money, which means finding more people willing to part with their cash, but you also have to keep existing customers happy and get them to spend more – and that's the tricky part.

Have no doubt: customers are a double-edged sword, simultaneously the lifeblood of a business, and the biggest headache of everyone from receptionist to ceo. There is this power struggle that goes on. The company providing the product or service would seem to have the upper hand, as they are offering something the customer wants. However, the customer knows there are other providers, so they take back the power by deciding which to go with. This decision is often based on two things: price and service. Sure, customers want to pay the lowest price possible, but they also want to be made to feel like the company cares about them. And if they don't feel like that, they will take their money to another provider.

And the balance of power is moving even further toward customers. With a well-worded, well-timed tweet, one individual now has the power to influence thousands of other customers and how brands are seen in the public eye.

THE PERFECT MIX

So, what's a company to do? Well, it's obvious: offer low prices and good service. It's not rocket science is it? Keep customers happy and prices down and you'll be rolling in money! The problem is that providing good customer service is really quite expensive. You know those call centres you hate so much? It may surprise you to learn that they can cost upwards of £3 per call to run. Multiply that by the millions of calls that companies can receive per year and suddenly it's very tempting for the



Customers hold the cash – but do they call all the shots?

business to add a couple of quid to its product price. For most medium to large companies, offering a first class service whilst keeping prices down is virtually impossible. Some companies have embraced this and actively market themselves as one or the other. For example, if you take a Virgin flight, you know it will be comfortable, you will have friendly cabin crew and a smooth journey. Plump for a budget airline on the other hand, and you know you will face an arduous checking in and boarding process, subjected to screaming children and unhelpful staff, and be made to pay for everything apart from the extremely small seat you've been allocated. But hey, the flight was such a low price you can't really complain.

Those businesses that have distinguished themselves through excellent service, or through low prices, tend to be the most

successful. The customer knows exactly what to expect and what they are willing to pay accordingly. The problems arise when companies fail to address customer expectation. And, let's be honest, for the average product or service, this expectation is pretty low – customers just want to be afforded a little common courtesy and to know that if something goes wrong, amends will be made.

So why do so many companies fail on even this simple level? The sad truth is that for many companies, the customer is sort of an afterthought. Board-level directors tend to be pre-occupied with sales and with operational issues (i.e. how much running the company costs). How the customer feels about the organisation rarely comes up, unless it's time for a new marketing campaign, in which case a group of strangers will be gathered in a room and asked whether they prefer the green or the red for





Businesses that make customer service a key part of the brand tend to be more successful

the new logo. At best, customer service is a line on the budget, which looks disproportionately large and the financial director is constantly questioning.

Successful companies tend to give a lot of power to their customers. The organisation asks its customers what they want and expect

so it can be sure not to disappoint them and can even go beyond these expectations in the hope that they will tell their friends. These companies employ people who have a genuine desire to help people and then they empower them by arming them with all the information they need to solve customer queries and

complaints. These firms respect and place huge importance on the opinion of the people who are in contact with customers every day and know them better than anyone.

A SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP

For the very best companies, though, it's not a question of power. Customer service is not even on their radar. They don't have special meetings to talk about it, they don't have customer service training days, and they don't have a customer service line on the budget. These companies understand that the customer is the reason they exist at all. Service is in their DNA, it's at the core of absolutely everything they do and as a result they don't give it a second thought. All they are thinking about is how to make customers feel good about doing business with them.

As a result, these companies turn their customers into fans. Fans who will only ever spend with them when they have the choice, and who will tell everyone they know about how fantastic the organisation is until the brand is so well-loved it becomes a part of culture and influences other products and services. And that's real power.



Mirror, mirror, on the wall...

Nathan Sage, COO of multi award winning Blue Sky Performance Improvement, poses some challenging questions to the current leaders of service.

Q: WILL YOUR LONG TERM STRATEGY GIVE YOU AN EDGE?

A: It is critical to develop the specific customer service strategy and model you want for your business and be brave enough to implement it. Do you know what your customers want and how market advantage can be captured?

Q: DO YOU EMPLOY PEOPLE WHO ACTUALLY LIKE PEOPLE?

A: People who like people will be passionate about serving them. Virgin Atlantic is a great example of making the recruitment and induction process a personal journey that truly embeds the Virgin brand.

Q: ARE YOUR LEADERS DRIVING

AN INFECTIOUS SERVICE CULTURE?

A: This requires congruent leadership. Their actions must align to the culture you aspire to. You must engage your people before you can expect them to engage your clients.

Q: ARE YOU MEASURING THE RIGHT STUFF?

A: A 5% increase in customer retention could yield between a 25%-100% improvement in profit. Whatever metrics you employ, measure and gather intelligence that ensures you can tweak service performance to have the biggest impact.

Q: DO YOU UNDERSTAND YOUR CUSTOMER'S JOURNEY?

A: This means knowing when and how to add value. How often do you get the opportunity to

emotionally connect with your customers and how aligned are your internal processes to what's important to them?

To download a free copy of Blue Sky's insight articles on Engaging Performance visit www.blue-sky.co.uk/engage or call Sarah on 01483739400

Blue Sky Performance Improvement is in business to help you engage your people and deliver you a sustainable result. Working within FTSE 250 companies and the Public Sector, we have award winning teams specialising in executive coaching, leadership, management development, customer service and sales performance improvement.



CUSTOMER SERVICE SUPERHEROES

Keeping customers happy and spending is more important than ever in an economic downturn. But who are the true superheroes when it comes to delighting UK consumers? **The National Customer Service Awards** has identified the best of the best in everything from management through to field service and contact centres in 2009



YOUNG CUSTOMER SERVICE PROFESSIONAL OF THE YEAR

Sponsored by Aviva



THE HERO: PHILIP GLEW, AMERICAN EXPRESS

The judges were looking for a young individual aged under 24 who could prove they had super-human skills in communication, problem solving and innovation. That individual turned out to be Philip Glew, who works for American Express. After joining the company in 2007, he has swiftly climbed the career ladder and is now a lead customer service representative and is responsible for a team of 18. He has used his own time to develop various projects and has been rewarded with his company's Chairman's Innovation Award for his talent and hard work.



"Our vision at Aviva is about recognising each customer as an individual and delivering a world-class service. Making this happen is about recognising the contribution our staff make to the service our customers receive. One way we like to reward and recognise the fantastic customer service our staff deliver is by entering the National Customer Service Awards."

DECADE OF EXCELLENCE

Sponsored by Directors Club



THE HERO: GLORIA EVANS, TORFAEN COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

During the last ten years, Gloria has transformed service in the council and has had a positive impact on tens of thousands of people. In some cases the changes made have been simply life changing. Passionate, determined and a great listener she has been the quiet and unassuming recipient of many accolades during the last ten years – always quick to pass the credit to her staff. This accolade is just for her, though, and she stands proudly as an inspiration to everyone involved in customer service.



"The Directors Club is delighted that this excellence award is so thoroughly deserved. Gloria sets the standard when it comes to customer service and there are many organisations out there that could learn from her example."

CUSTOMER SERVICE NEWCOMER OF THE YEAR

Sponsored by The Royal Mail



THE HERO: JADE LOWTHER, SOLUS (AVIVA)

This award is given to an individual who has recently started working in a customer service role, but has already made a big impact. And they certainly found it in the eventual winner. Jade Lowther began working for Solus, a company which is responsible for repairing cars for Aviva Insurance, as a temporary customer service advisor. But within twelve months she has been promoted no fewer than three times to her current role of customer service manager. Not bad, when you consider that she has to deal with people who have just had a car accident. But even though the conversations can be difficult, Jade says she delights in exceeding customer expectations. What's more, she's had an impact on the service offered by the whole company by helping to reduce the average repair time by 25 per cent.



Royal Mail

"Delivering a consistently great service experience to our customers is the highest priority for us and we are always on the look out for new and talented service people who can help shape and improve the service we provide. So we're delighted to be participating in this year's National Customer Service Awards and sponsoring the Best Customer Service Newcomer of the Year award."

CUSTOMER SERVICE MANAGER OF THE YEAR

Sponsored by The Royal Bank of Scotland



HOLIDAYS

THE HERO: PAULINE WILSON, VIRGIN HOLIDAYS

The hardworking people of Britain truly value their holiday, and searching for the perfect location and the best deal is all part of the excitement. Anything less than a smooth and problem-free experience, from booking to arriving home, can tarnish the memory. That's why Pauline Wilson has put in some truly heroic work at Virgin Holidays to transform the experience of people choosing the company for their annual break. She has ensured that all business decisions and processes have the customer at their heart (something a surprising number of companies seem to forget). Pauline insists that she never loses sight of the fact that customers save all year for their holidays and are relying on Virgin to deliver on their promises.



The Royal Bank of Scotland Group

"The Royal Bank of Scotland and NatWest are delighted to be part of these awards, which recognise and promote service excellence and we'd like to congratulate all of the finalists."



United Business Media

CUSTOMER SERVICE CONTACT CENTRE PROFESSIONAL OF THE YEAR

Sponsored by the Institute of Customer Service

THE HERO: MARK WILSON, CAPITA LIFE & PENSIONS

The thought of ringing a call centre is enough to bring most people out in a cold sweat. But, believe it or not, there are some examples of fantastic service over the phone. This award has highlighted seven individuals who quickly take ownership of a caller's query or problem and take care of it professionally and effectively. Let's face it, what you want most of all when you ring a company is for someone to actually understand what you want and get it done – and that's where Mark Wilson comes in. He works in Capita Life & Pensions call centre and has an astonishing 100 per cent record of accurately solving customer queries. He's already won an internal award for customer service, innovation and team working, and now he's been recognised on a national scale too.



"The Institute aims to lead customer service performance and professionalism, acting as the authoritative voice of customer service in the UK – and our involvement in the National Customer Service Awards is a key part of that."

involvement in the National Customer Service Awards is a key part of that."



CUSTOMER SERVICE LEADER OF THE YEAR

Sponsored by BSKyB



THE HERO: ANTHONY DEVANE, AMERICAN EXPRESS

The role of customer service director is a tough one in any organisation. Fighting shrinking budgets, whilst simultaneously wowing customers and making sure they keep spending with the company can be a tricky juggling act and requires authority and self-belief. Anthony Devane is more adept

than most, working tirelessly to support his team in the challenging environment of financial services. Anthony has a keen grasp on the importance of customer service: "Focusing on customer service is critical because if we can provide a higher level of certainty in a world that is uncertain, it gives us an advantage over our competitors," he says.

"Strong leadership is critical in meeting the needs of customers and achieve business goals. We were bowled over by the high standard of entries in this award and Anthony is a true inspiration."

THE ICS FRONT-LINE CUSTOMER SERVICE PROFESSIONAL OF THE YEAR

Sponsored by O2

THE HERO: BRYAN MOYLAN, TORFAEN COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

You don't often think of your local bin man as a customer service champion. But, as Bryan Moylan knows, these hardy men of the road are the public face of their organisation. Bryan supervises a team of refuse collectors for Torfaen County Borough Council and takes his responsibility for the health and safety of his team and the general public very seriously. Bryan says he relishes his role no matter what the weather.

O₂

"We know that being the for customers, whenever they need you, takes a special kind of team

with very special people: people who make lasting connections and lasting relationships. This award recognises those who deliver the greatest service and turn customers into fans."

BACK OFFICE TEAM OF THE YEAR

Sponsored by Call Centre Focus magazine



THE HERO: SARA PATTERSON, PREMIER ENERGY, BRITISH GAS CARDIFF

So far we've focused on the faces of customer service on the front line of organisations who come into contact with customers every day.

But dealing with customer enquiries and complaints takes a surprising amount of administration and there are some very busy people behind the scenes making sure that service representatives have everything they need to keep customers happy. Sara Patterson's Premier Energy team look after resource and planning at British Gas Cardiff and has worked hard at the relationship with its internal partners to cater for their specific needs.

callcentre
focus

"Customer service is not merely the preserve of customer-facing staff – it's essential that this ethos is drilled down to all levels of the organisation

and this award recognises the staff working behind the scenes to make the service appear seamless."





AWARD FOR BEST TRAINING OR DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE

Sponsored by Top 50 Call Centres for Customer Service

THE HERO: WENDY LISTER, 'REACH HIGHER', COLOPLAST

A customer service agent is only ever as good as the training they have been provided with by their company. This award seeks to highlight those training projects that have made a real difference to customers by making sure that staff know their products and services inside out. The winning initiative was one by medical supply company Coloplast. Their main product offers quality of life to patients who have suffered serious bowel surgery or spinal cord injury and the 'Reach Higher' training programme, led by Wendy Lister, was designed to improve the quality of service offered by staff.



"We know the importance of trust in the customer-company relationship and a big part of building that trust is reassuring the customer that the person they are speaking to knows the company and knows the products well enough to offer good advice. Congratulations to Wendy and her team who have worked hard to maintain excellent product knowledge."

THE FIELD SERVICE AWARD

Sponsored by Service Management magazine

THE HERO: HEATHER WILSON, FIELD SERVICE TEAM, ANGLIAN WATER SERVICES

Field service involves company representatives travelling the country to deliver products and services direct to businesses and individual consumers. Anglian Water Services has been recognised by the National Customer Service Awards for transforming the quality of service offered by its field team. The improvement is largely thanks to Heather Wilson and you can read more about their achievements on page 12 of this publication.



Service Management magazine is the only dedicated journal for the field service management community, offering strategic thinking and operational insight.

BEST USE OF TECHNOLOGY IN CUSTOMER SERVICE

Sponsored by ClickSoftware



THE HERO: EMMA WILKINSON, 'GRAPHICAL RUN PROGRESSION'

Waiting home for your new kitchen or bathroom to be delivered, only to discover that the van is stuck in traffic and you're going to have to take another half day off work is a frustrating, yet familiar, scenario. Mark Two, which organises home deliveries for many high street retailers has come up with a nifty system which allows customers to track their delivery and so take the minimum amount of time to receive it. The introduction of the system was led by Emma Wilkinson, who raves that customers are delighted with the service.



"Today, customers have more choice and higher expectations than ever before. With the advent of social media, it has never been easier for customers to vent their fury and frustrations about the service they've experienced. Effective use of technology can create a quantum leap in the ability of a service organisation to deliver exceptional customer service. ClickSoftware feels that The National Customer Service Awards provide fantastic recognition for businesses that are committed to transforming the service experience."

THE SOCAPIE AWARD FOR INNOVATION IN CUSTOMER SERVICE

Sponsored by Balfour Beatty Utility Solutions

THE HERO: 'ONE TOUCH', VANGENT

Many companies say they are looking for the 'Big Idea' from their employees – and it doesn't come much bigger than completely transforming the customer service arm of your organisation. But that's exactly what the 'One Touch' team at outsourcing firm Vangent have delivered for Southwark Council. Stripping out inefficiency and introducing pro-active service has resulted in faster, more effective query resolution.



"Works in the utilities industry have the potential to heavily impact the customer, so we understand the importance of delivering a high quality experience. With this in mind, we would like to commend all this year's finalists on their achievements."



CUSTOMER SERVICE EMPLOYER OF THE YEAR

Sponsored by Invest Northern Ireland



THE HERO: DREW STEVENS-KING, BUTLINS

Butlins is a unique company in that every single one of its 3,500 employees are considered customer service team members. The guest is at the heart of everything they do and many team members started out as Redcoats or making beds. Even the current managing director started his working life as a bar worker at one of the resorts. Head of culture and development Drew Stevens-King, who accepted the award on behalf of the company, says that the firm believes strongly in recruiting for attitude and training for skills.



"It's important to recognise those organisations that support a culture of staff development to ensure customers continue to be delighted."



CUSTOMER SERVICE CONTACT CENTRE OF THE YEAR (OVER 100 SEATS)

Sponsored by Calcom

THE HERO: PETER SINDEN, LV=

LV= is a leading mutual financial services company offering a wide range of insurance products. The contact centre at LV= is at the heart of our business, with the team dealing with tens of thousands of calls a day on queries as diverse as which countries our car insurance covers to whether or not our home insurance covers claims from paint spills on the carpet. As we are a mutual, we do not have any shareholders and therefore exists wholly for the benefit of our members and customers. Our philosophy is to put customers first and ensure members benefit from everything we do.



"Getting customer service right is fundamental in today's economic conditions. The biggest challenge for every organisation is to transform how staff and leaders think, behave and perform to provide fantastic service. The National Customer Service Awards recognises those companies and individuals who are great at getting it right every time."

CUSTOMER SERVICE CONTACT CENTRE OF THE YEAR (UP TO 100 SEATS)

Sponsored by British Gas



THE HERO: DIANE EVANS, LIVERPOOL HOUSING TRUST

Being the first point of contact for social housing tenants is a huge undertaking, and Liverpool Housing Trust places a great deal of importance on its contact centre, which plays a key role in helping customers. Manager Diane Evans says the centre has worked closely with customers about how they deliver the service, right down to the content of call greeting menus and selecting their preferred voice.



"We're immensely proud to be finalists in several categories ourselves this year,

and completely appreciate how tough it is to get this far. Congratulations to all the finalists in this category – we wish you all every success for the future."

LV= A JOB YOU'LL



LV=, proud winners of the Call Centre of the Year Award, put people and customers at the centre of the business.

Firstly, we recruit and train the right people. Then it's down to us to treat our people well (we call it treating people like family), and make it easy for them to delight our customers.

Happy customers stay with us longer, buy more products and recommend us. That makes us a more successful business offering even better development and career opportunities for our people. They'll keep offering our customers an even better service... you get the picture. A simple formula, and one that we're going to keep trying to get just right.

If you'd like to join a winning team, visit:
www.lv.com/careers; Telephone: 0800 066 5331; Email: recruit@lv.com



CUSTOMER SERVICE TEAM OF THE YEAR – PUBLIC SECTOR AND EDUCATION

Sponsored by Manchester Airport



Haringey Council

THE HERO: ROBERT WAITE, BRUCE CASTLE MUSEUM, HARINGEY COUNCIL

Not many people will have heard of the Bruce Castle Museum, which is dedicated to the life and achievements of the founder of the Post Office – but Robert Waite at Haringey Council is working to change all that. He has listened to members of the public to revitalise what was a fusty museum with little relevance to the community into an establishment that reflects local history and interests.



“At Manchester Airport we value our customers and our aim is to make their journey through the airport as easy as possible. We have many initiatives in place to train and engage employees across all areas to provide excellent customer service. Our overall aim is to operate the World’s airport of choice by 2012 and by ensuring customer service is a five star standard is just one of the ways we will achieve this.”

“At Manchester Airport we value our customers and our aim is to make their journey through the airport as easy as possible. We have

CUSTOMER SERVICE TEAM OF THE YEAR – BUSINESS TO CONSUMER

Sponsored by Customer Strategy magazine



THE HERO: NICK TAYLOR, EPPING FOREST BURIAL PARK, WOODLAND BURIAL PARKS

The team at Epping Forest Burial Park have developed a new service concept for burials. They provide two-hour time slots as standard to allow families appropriate time for the service of their loved one, so that no-one feels rushed. The park is open to people of all faiths and those of none. A large proportion of plot sales are people planning ahead for their own future. This is a unique mature bluebell woodland that provides sensitive customer service to families, the local community and the environment.

The team at Epping Forest



“Nick Taylor’s team have proved that putting service at the heart of your organisation, even in the most difficult of circumstances, can pay dividends – as is proved by the healthy order book for future burials at the park.”

“Nick Taylor’s team have proved that putting service at the heart of your organisation, even in the most difficult of circumstances,

CUSTOMER SERVICE COMPLAINTS TEAM OF THE YEAR

Sponsored by Customer Strategy magazine



THE HERO: CUSTOMER SERVICE COMPLAINTS, TELEFONICA O2 UK

O2 knows how tough it can be dealing with customer complaints day in and day out. But the mobile provider has positioned its complaints team at the very centre of its strategy to turn all its customers into fans. The team has worked to not only resolve complaints effectively and quickly, but also to make sure the root causes are investigated to ensure future complaints are reduced.



“One of the toughest jobs in the world is taking customer complaints on a regular basis and it takes a very special type of person to do it effectively. So it really is to the finalists’ credit to be recognised in these awards.”

“One of the toughest jobs in the world is taking customer complaints on a regular basis and it takes a

FRONT LINE CUSTOMER SERVICE TEAM OF THE YEAR

Sponsored by Call Centre Focus magazine



THE HERO: LUNA GOMEZ, FRONT OF HOUSE TEAM, TOWER42

Tower 42 is a very special building, that is not only an iconic landmark of the London skyline but also a leader in the field of managed offices through its world-class customer service. The front of house team plays a huge part in that. Speaking nine languages between them, they strive for a five-star hotel reception concierge style rather than the traditional ‘managed’ approach. The team have suggested many additions to the service offered, which now include organic vending, dry cleaning, car valet, hair and beauty treatments and even tailoring.



“Delivering a fantastic face-to-face service is something Tower 42 has worked consistently hard for and this accolade is a tribute to all the staff at all levels of the organisation, but particularly the front of house team, who make sure the public face of the building is never anything less than friendly and helpful.”

“Delivering a fantastic face-to-face service is something Tower 42 has worked consistently hard for and this accolade is a tribute to all the staff at all levels of the



CUSTOMER SERVICE MANAGEMENT TEAM OF THE YEAR

Sponsored by SOCAPIE



THE HERO: JOHN GENTRY, MANAGEMENT TEAM, TOWER 42

Any customer service team is only as good as its manager, and leading the customer service management team at Tower 42 is John Gentry, who believes his role is not that of a facilities manager, but that of a five-star hotel manager. The team believes passionately in delivering the highest standard of service to all customers and this is the lynchpin that holds the team together and drives it towards true excellence.



"Working alongside key players in the world of consumer affairs, we know the power of great management and the value of recognition, and sponsoring the award means we can combine the two."



CUSTOMER SERVICE TEAM OF THE YEAR – FINANCIAL SERVICES

Sponsored by the National Business Awards

THE HERO: ELAINE CAIN, PEEL BRANCH, ISLE OF MAN BANK

The financial services industry has been a harsh environment of late, which has made giving excellent service something of a challenge. But one local bank branch has striven to do more for its customers in these tough times. Manager of the Peel branch of the Isle of Man bank, Elaine Cain will often open early in bad weather so that customers are not left waiting in the cold. This local bank serves just 3,500 customers, but it has consistently come top in terms of satisfaction compared to other banks on the island.



"Knowing your customers is key to any successful business and Elaine and her team have demonstrated that getting

to know and care about your customers really does generate loyalty that can see you through the bad times."

CUSTOMER SERVICE TEAM OF THE YEAR – BUSINESS TO BUSINESS AND OVERALL TEAM OF THE YEAR

Sponsored by Fujitsu



THE HERO: GEORGE BRAY, INTENSIVE WINDOWS 1, RACKSPACE

People outside looking in on customer service organisations are often surprised at the amount of passion displayed by the professionals making sure life runs more smoothly. They really do care. But one team that takes this passion to another level is George Bray's team at Rackspace, who support businesses that have signed up to the company's hosting and cloud computing services. This team is on a mission to become one of the best service team in the world and their enthusiasm and commitment has led to astonishing customer loyalty. They impressed the judges so much that they also won the overall award for Customer Service Team of the Year.



"Fujitsu is a leading provider of IT Service Desks and our clients trust our people to deliver a compelling and consistent service to their IT users. Our service staff are fundamental to creating value for our clients and they achieve this through the way they work: focusing on the user experience and driving continual service improvements to ensure the IT service evolves in line with the user and business needs."

Active Digital Communications, established in 1996, provides mobile (inc. Blackberry & iPhone), fixed line and data communication solutions to UK organisations of all sizes, including The British Red Cross and GB Cycling.

Companies are challenged to achieve faster speeds to market, maximised service availability and enhanced customer satisfaction and retention. Active Digital is helping businesses to develop a unified communication technology solution and quantify the business value of Unified Communications investments. A solid commitment to customer service and retention remains high on Active Digital's agenda for 2010, with their outstanding 96% customer retention level. Winners at the National Customer Service Awards in both 2007 and 2008, plus finalists in 2009, Active Digital have built a brand which is well respected by industry leaders and customers alike. Watch online videos and read customer success stories at www.activedigital.co.uk or call **01892 835522** to find out more.



we're changing communications.





Anglian Water has turned its whole way of working upside-down just so it can be more open and honest with its customers – and has become a more efficient business as a result. **Dennis Flower** finds out more...

A refreshing change

Utility companies aren't exactly renowned for caring about their customers, and you would think a water company would care even less – it's not as though customers can just switch to another provider.

Anglian Water is different. When this utility company realised that almost half of its 4.5million customers were unhappy with some form of its service, it completely re-imagined its service offering – and transformed itself into the 2009 winner of the National Customer Service Awards field service category.

So how did Anglian Water manage to turn disgruntled customers into fans of the company? One of the first changes in the business was the creation of a new Operational Management Centre. Service monitoring team manager Heather Wilson was involved in the new division from its inception.

She explains that pre-OMC, processes for distributing maintenance jobs were haphazard to say the least. "Each team did their own thing," says Wilson. "The printer in the office would simply kick in and print out job tickets, with little central control around the work that was distributed or the order it was done in other than waiting for the completed tickets to be returned by the engineers. We had limited visibility of what work we completed and just as importantly what we didn't get completed."

The OMC saw a much more ordered way of working and improved the way staff worked internally, but customers really started to feel a difference following the introduction of automatic scheduling and mobile working. This allowed Anglian to look at scheduling requirements, such as travel time and time taken to complete jobs – and customers calling with a water problem got a much clearer picture of when it would be resolved.

A crucial part of this work management overhaul saw the field workforce issued with laptop computers, which give engineers call details without having to travel to depots. This saves time and, as a result, operations completed have risen by 35 per cent and the backlog of work has reduced by 96 per cent. This has meant less engineer overtime, saving the company money. But more important to Anglian is that the percentage of happy customers has risen dramatically. The company is now trialling the use of tracking devices in some of its vans to allow customer service representatives to tell customers exactly where their engineer is and their likely time of arrival.

This efficient use of technology has led to the company coming top of industry regulator OFWAT's performance assessment table for two years running. And winning the field service category of the National Customer Service Awards has cemented the company's belief that happy customers make for a better

Reading the meter: Anglian Water in numbers

The size of the customer service challenge for the utility company becomes clear when you look at the vital statistics.

4,000 Number of employees

4.5m Number of customers

£969m Annual turnover

1,400 Number of engineers out on the road

37,000km of water mains to maintain

140 water treatment works

business, and Anglian Water plans to continue to make improvements for years to come.

Dennis Flower is editor of Service Management magazine
www.servicemanagement365.co.uk



Do you have what it takes to be a superhero?

If your company has achieved superhuman feats of customer service, then it's time it was recognised by the nation.

Making customers happy is important, which means

the people providing service to your customers are important too – isn't it time to reward them? As well as making customer service representatives feel valued, there are a whole host of benefits to entering the National Customer Service Awards. Here are just five:

1. REFLECT ON YOUR SUCCESS

Often in the busy environment of everyday business, achievements can be easily forgotten. Just completing the entry form allows you to pause and consider what contributed to your success and where you can go from here.

2. MEASURE YOUR PERFORMANCE

The awards offer a benchmarking report, which will assess the strength of your entry against others in your category. Useful if you want to be able to gauge how your business compares against the very best in all UK industries.

3. POSITIVE PR

Being selected as a winner or finalist is a great achievement and a real opportunity to generate positive publicity for your business across all media. Plus, it makes you look good in the eyes of your bosses.

4. DIFFERENTIATE YOUR BUSINESS

What better way to make your business stand out than being a national award winner in the UK's most prestigious, cross-industry awards programme? It allows you to demonstrate to your current

and future customers, employees and competitors that yours is an exceptional business.

5. CELEBRATE YOUR ACHIEVEMENTS

A representative of all short listed finalists is invited to attend the award ceremony and dinner free of charge and you'll have priority on table bookings for the night. It's a truly fantastic event and an ideal opportunity to hobnob with professionals from other successful businesses.

Entering is easy. You simply fill in an online form describing how wonderful your company and staff are by July 30th 2010. Your entry will then be submitted to the panel of judges. This is made up of industry professionals with a reputation for excellence, consultants and even academics who decide which companies to take through to the finals.

If you are lucky enough to be shortlisted, you will be invited to Tower 42 in London, where you will present to the judges why you feel you deserve to be the eventual winner. It's scary, but all our previous finalists tell us it is an ultimately rewarding experience.

Then you get to go to the awards ceremony and wait nervously for the winners to be announced before really letting your hair down on the dance floor. Whether you win or not, it's a great night.

Sound good? Just go to www.customerserviceawards.com for more hints and tips and the entry form. Or call Ryan Bowyer on 020 72348756 for more information.



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Edexcel is the UK's largest awarding body, certifying 1.5 million GCE, GCSE and BTEC learners annually. We aim to offer exceptional service to teachers, lecturers and examinations officers. Our qualifications help young people and adult learners to maximise their potential in life, and our customers rely on us for expertise and support in today's challenging educational environment.

Edexcel was a finalist in last year's National Customer Service Awards

We recently launched a major service improvement programme, developing short-term process 'fixes' and longer-term strategic plans around HR, technology and product design. The common driver was to place the customer experience at the heart of all improvement activities.

We became a member of the Institute of Customer Service in 2009 and, in recognition of our achievements, were nominated as a finalist in last year's National Customer Service Awards.



For more information please visit: www.edexcel.com

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FACING UP TO REALITY

Much of the investment in customer service has been going to waste, and organisations are failing to recognise the complex challenges customer-facing staff have to deal with every day.

Many organisations within the UK customer service industry continue to invest substantial amounts of money in developing service visions, customer strategies, and ever more sophisticated CRM systems. All this is done in the genuine belief that they will achieve excellence and re-invent themselves as organisations that are a delight to do business with.

Unfortunately, the reality is that most customer experiences continue to disappoint and have instilled an enduring disbelief in service promises - with particular venom directed at call centres. Try to remember a time when there was no longwinded, automated call handling system that eventually directs you to someone whose

Customers seem to be as frustrated as ever



behaviour can be ranked somewhere from thoroughly uninterested to deliberately unhelpful.

But after all that investment, to little or no effect, facing up to reality is tough for the industry. Because, let's face it, all that money spent on service improvement seems to be having next to no impact on alleviating the daily frustrations of those long-suffering customers. Just as significantly, those working at the sharp end, with the responsibility for delivering on some very ambitious promises, do not seem to have received training that actually makes that delivery possible.

We believe it is time to truly recognise where the issues in delivering 'great customer service' really exist; and to acknowledge that customer-facing staff have difficult jobs to do in circumstances that range from challenging to almost impossible. Therefore, it is essential to deliver a behavioural change solution that is firmly grounded in the realities they face every day. Beyond the service visions, customer strategies and sophisticated systems, this is the critical and often neglected requirement.

Our considerable experience in designing and delivering behavioural change training programmes has enabled us to identify three essential components that ensure success:

Forget sterile training rooms, overhead projectors and amateur role-plays

First, make the training totally realistic. Forget sterile training rooms, overhead projectors and amateur role-plays. Instead, in-depth research is vital to accurately recreate the environments, people and issues that represent the challenges faced in delivering a service promise day-in, day out. Only authentic backdrops and props, with professional actors and specialist trainers formed into fully rehearsed and co-ordinated delivery teams will achieve complete credibility.

Second, don't ask people to change their personalities because, quite simply, they can't.

Instead, help them to recognise and value who they are, what makes them tick and the individual strengths they bring to their role. Then enable them to recognise the different ways in which other people with differing personalities view the world. Challenge the conditioned belief that 'we should treat others as we want to be treated'. Rather, let them find their own ways to treat others, and especially their customers, as they need to be treated.

Finally, recognise that logic alone will not change behaviour. All training requires an emotional impact to connect directly with the sub-conscious and drive the change.

So, the service industry is strongly advised to acknowledge that the most neglected element is actually the most important; bringing about the behavioural change that is required from top to bottom of the organisation. While conventional 'classroom' based training almost certainly won't achieve that change, facing up to reality will.

Ian Smith, Chairman, Power Train (UK) Ltd



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REBUILDING TRUST

After a 'difficult' period for the financial services sector, how has a credit card firm managed to win a clutch of nominations for excellence in customer service? **Claudia Hathway** talks to the UK vice president of customer service at American Express **Jose Vazquez-Mendez** to find out...

If one market understands the importance of customer service more than any other, it's the financial services sector. It's certainly been a tough year, but the advantage of the economic crisis is that it offers the opportunity to shine. So while most financial services companies are trying to keep a low profile, or are making cutbacks, American Express is actively investing in employee training and creating a world-class service organisation in the process. I spoke to Jose Vazquez-Mendez about the thinking behind the strategy and why recognising employee excellence is so vital.

CLAUDIA HATHWAY: HOW IMPORTANT IS CUSTOMER SERVICE TO THE MODERN BUSINESS?

Jose Vazquez-Mendez: It's critical. The 160-year history of American Express is rooted in being a 'service' company. As a result, service has always been part of our brand DNA, it's the foundation that our business is built on. We know great service begins with the people who deliver it, and we invest in our people because the service ethos of our customer care professionals is the number one way in which we can set ourselves apart from competitors.

The past 18 months have shown us that when there is a great deal of uncertainty in the world, consumers and corporations want to work with companies and brands that they believe will deliver on their promises. We know that reputations can be won or lost in a crisis.

CH: WHAT ARE THE MAIN CHALLENGES WHEN IT COMES TO OFFERING FANTASTIC CUSTOMER SERVICE?

JVM: The bar for good service is always rising, across all industries, and for me, the biggest challenge is how we can stay above that bar to differentiate on service, and deliver for our customers. In tough economic times, it can be a temptation for a business to trim back and try and cut costs in every area, including customer service costs, but while other companies have done that, American Express has invested in creating a new global servicing organisation.

CH: HOW DO YOU THINK THEY CAN BE SOLVED?

JVM: It's really important, particularly in a customer service environment, to hire people for their attitude rather than their experience. Any skills they need can be taught, but you cannot teach anyone to patiently listen to (sometimes quite angry) customers day after day after day – and be just as polite and friendly with the last as they were with the first. We invest

in our people to help them realise their own potential, including offering career development opportunities. We understand the link between motivated and engaged employees, excellent customer service and the bottom line.

CH: DO YOU THINK THE UK HAS A GOOD REPUTATION FOR CUSTOMER SERVICE?

JVM: Since I recently took over responsibilities in the UK, I've seen some amazingly committed and talented people in our customer service organisation. For American Express a reputation for good customer service isn't about where we are located, but more about being a truly global organisation that constantly listens to not only the customer, but also to employees, as well as industry trends that help us to challenge ourselves every day and keep us committed to giving the best service experience in every interaction with customers around the world. In the UK specifically, the customer expectation is high and that can only make service providers become better as we all compete to retain and gain new customers. It's a challenge that I am glad to take on.

CH: WHAT DOES GOOD CUSTOMER SERVICE LOOK LIKE?

JVM: For me, good customer service is about putting the customer's voice first. How did they feel when they hung up the phone? Did we answer their question? Do they feel that we listened to them, and recognised the value that they bring to us? Good service is not about average hold time or how quickly we can manage calls, it's about how rapidly we can solve problems for customers and build a relationship with them. You know when you've delivered good service because that customer will be willing to recommend you to their friends.

Awards are also a really important endorsement for a brand and the National Customer Service Awards bring national recognition to service heroes across the UK, helping define the benchmark for great service.



The National Customer Service Awards would like to thank Jose and the team at American Express for their generous support of this supplement, which couldn't have been produced without them.

Everyone at the National Customer Service Awards would like to thank our generous sponsors:



United Business Media





Don't be a #fail

Keeping tabs on all the chatter within **social media** can be difficult, but at **gem** we have some unique online tools that can do the job for you. The bottom line is, **If you don't manage the message, someone else will.**

Letting off steam

The ideal place for the irate consumer to freely let off steam is instantly through the many available social media channels.

But with brands increasingly compelled to monitor social media channels, those who complain can now be effectively intercepted with offers of help. The question is, when is it right to offer help and what are the most effective ways to do it?

The right course of action

Customer support using social media incorporates an implicit expectation about the speed at which the dialogue will progress - determining the right course of action can be complex.

At gem we have appropriately skilled staff who can effectively manage your company's social media interface. gem does this in a way which fully reflects your brand's vision, values and ethos.

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