



The Telecom Industry Tunes in to the Customer Experience

A look at how the telecom industry has evolved its customer strategies to meet consumers' changing needs and behaviors

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Executive Overview:

Choosing the Right Technologies to Guide the Telecom Customer Experience

As telecommunications companies continue to battle for customer loyalty, the key differentiator to help brands to distinguish themselves is the ability to provide subscribers with consistent experiences across the various touchpoints and interaction channels they use.

While it's essential for carriers to have the right people and processes in place to help shape customers' experiences, it's also necessary to have the right technologies in place. Together, they will provide a foundation for delivering consistent experiences to customers across multiple channels cost effectively.

Of course, people, processes, and technology need to work in harmony in order to provide customers with great experiences. This includes providing employees with the tools and data that can enable them to best serve the customer with personalized support.

For instance, I can call into a carrier's contact center and an associate answers the call. She may know my name or have my profile in front of her. The associate may ask for qualifying information to validate me. It's a pretty generic customer experience where the associate is doing more to find out about me than actually knowing who I am. It's a lukewarm interaction at best.

Here's a different scenario: When I call in, the associate can see on her screen that it's Sean Carithers calling, that I've been a high-value customer for the past 15 years, and that my birthday was last week. When associates are armed with these types of insights, they're able to provide customers with a relevant, warm, and personalized greeting.

Of course, a number of technologies need to be integrated with one another in order to allow the associate to provide a customer with this type of tailored experience. Computer telephony integration (CTI), IVR, intelligent call routing, and knowledge management systems need to be tied together to enable associates to deliver the type of knowledgeable support the customer expects.

Identify your state of readiness

Technology alone won't enable your organization to deliver consistent customer experiences. Start by identifying your organization's strengths and weaknesses in delivering customer experiences, the technologies, processes, and skill sets of customer-facing employees that are currently in place, and the company's key challenges.

It's also important to candidly assess your organization's existing technology status. If your company recently invested \$20 million in a CRM system, organizational leaders likely aren't willing to rip it out if the platform is underperforming in certain areas. Instead, determine the necessary changes, prioritize the action items, and create a tactical plan for executing improvements.

Developing and using a customer journey map is a terrific way to identify how customers use different channels and to better understand their expectations, needs, and preferences at each point throughout their journey. For instance, a common reason for wireless customers to contact a carrier's customer service is dropped calls. By using a journey map and assessing customer support interactions on such heightened calls may show that a high percentage of customers would rather resolve such issues on their own using web self-service tools. Organizational leaders can use insights gleaned from journey mapping to ensure that the right information is provided to customers on its website to help them resolve their dropped call issues satisfactorily and ensure the site itself is intuitive and easy for customers to use.

Understanding the customer journey is just one of the elements that's needed to deliver great customer experiences. Telecom companies also need the right balance of people, processes, and technology. Think of it as the three-legged stool of customer experience. You can't do one without the other two. Therefore, you can't improve a customer-facing process without having the technology there to support it. Carriers also shouldn't add new technologies without determining if the existing processes work or if they need to change.

– Sean Carithers, Vice President of Customer Experience Solutions, TeleTech



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Adapted from *Customer Strategist Journal*

8 Innovative Ways to Drive Mobile Data Growth

Eight popular initiatives that are being used by mobile telecom operators globally.

1. Try and buy campaigns

Operators need to design effective **try and buy campaigns** that link free trials with a sales conversion program to boost market share quickly and obtain ‘first mover’ advantage in emerging markets. If executed well, it builds awareness among prepaid subscribers and contributes to increases in operator revenue.

> **EXAMPLE:** Vodafone has a successful ‘Data Test Drive’ campaign to allow people to experiment with using 3G mobile data, and at the end of the month suggest the best plan based on their usage patterns.

2. Staggered data plans

Staggered data plans can be implemented in emerging markets, such as the Philippines and Indonesia, where the majority of the subscribers are spending in small amounts and do not want to make long-term commitments for data plans.

> **EXAMPLE:** NTT Docomo offers postpaid pay-as-you-go users the capability to switch over to volume-based plans if they exceed a certain data limit.

3. Dynamic data pricing

Operators can offer specific discounts at the right time to reduce traffic congestion and modify subscriber behavior to consistently use mobile data. This will be effective in emerging countries such as Philippines, Thailand, and Indonesia where subscribers are price sensitive and promotion driven.

> **EXAMPLE:** AXIS Indonesia offers ‘pay-to-boost’ speed where users pay a small fee to increase their mobile data once they have reached their data limits and experience ‘throttling.’ MTN Africa offers 1GB to ‘Night Owls’ who typically browse late at night or early in the morning.

4. Bucket pricing

Bucket pricing presents opportunities to increase share-of-wallet and save costs for both mature and emerging markets. Operators need to educate consumers about bucket plans and find solutions for the increased complexity in service provisioning and billing.

> **EXAMPLE:** AT&T USA is aggressively pushing bucket plans for multi-devices under one plan where additional devices can be easily added to a data plan. Reliance India is promoting its family bucket plans where each family is given 3GB of data in addition to free talk time that can be shared among three subscribers.

5. Education campaigns

Education campaigns help operators from emerging markets promote awareness and improve consumer understanding on the available plans and the benefits of mobile data on their daily lives.

> **EXAMPLE:** Operators all around the world are developing educational pamphlets, apps to monitor consumer usage and current spend, and making educational information available in sales brochures online.

6. Wi-Fi bundling

Wi-Fi bundling can be used as a strong value proposition to move subscribers to volume-based plans or as an add-on service. However, operators should ensure the proper availability and quality of their Wi-Fi service and allow subscribers to seamlessly connect.

> **EXAMPLE:** Vodafone UK partnered with BT OpenNet to deliver over 4,000 hotspots. Vodafone's in-house apps detect Wi-Fi hotspots and automatically switch from 3G to Wi-Fi.

7. Leverage social networking

Facebook-type (FB) packages can be used as a hook to lure subscribers to use more mobile data. Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines are good examples where social networking has become very popular, and operators from other regions should explore this.

> **EXAMPLE:** Globe Telecom in the Philippines is leveraging social media packages that include access to Facebook, Blackberry, and Google mobile services for a promotional period.

8. Reverse handset subsidies

Reverse handset subsidies allow operators to collect payment for devices upfront and give back a portion of the value monthly in the form of a rebate for free voice and data services.

> **EXAMPLE:** MTS India offers potential subscribers a choice of two models of smartphone. Subscribers pay the full retail price of the handsets. In return, they get a monthly rebate in the form of free voice, SMS, and mobile data over a period of 12 months that exceeds the original price of the phone.

Where the initiatives fit across the customer lifecycle

Trend	Maturity Lifecycle Stage			
	Adoption	Addiction	Monetization	Awareness
Try & buy campaigns	✓	✓	✓	
Tiered data plans	✓	✓		
Dynamic data pricing		✓	✓	
Bucket pricing	✓	✓		
Education campaigns				✓
Wi-Fi bundling	✓	✓		
Leverage social networking	✓	✓		
Reverse handset subsidies	✓			

Adapted from *Customer Strategist Journal*

Mobile World Congress Wrap-Up: OTT vs. Telecommunications Carriers

Instead of fighting them, traditional telecoms are beginning to find ways to work with OTT players for mutual benefit.

Recently, Barcelona played host to the annual Mobile World Congress, where telecom carriers, consumer electronics makers, digital players, and others came together to promote new ideas, gadgets, and ways of doing business in the telecommunications industry. The show is becoming increasingly important as mobile communication, commerce, entertainment, and information have become our way of life. What happens here can impact businesses and consumers around the world.

There was no shortage of news at this year's conference, which we look at here through a customer strategy lens. The more interesting pieces of news came from over-the-top (OTT) players:

OTT grows up

The biggest buzz was around Facebook's acquisition of mobile messaging app WhatsApp for a whopping \$19 billion. The company has only about 55 employees, which averages to roughly \$400 million per employee. Indeed, Facebook values WhatsApp slightly less than U.S. operator T-Mobile, which has a \$24.9 billion market cap and generates \$24 billion in revenues with 38,000 employees. To put it into perspective, reporters at Slate.com remarked that WhatsApp is worth more than "the Hubble Space Telescope, Iceland, American Airlines, and Gap."

An item is only worth as much as someone is willing to pay for it. And, Mark Zuckerberg was willing to pay billions for a small app that today generates relatively little revenue. What WhatsApp has going for it is an engaged, worldwide customer base: "450 million monthly users, 70 percent of whom are active on a given day," according to *Forbes*. Customers subscribe to the service for \$1 per year, and they provide valuable customer data to the company. The site averages 1 million new registered users per day, and Zuckerberg predicts it will reach 1 billion users worldwide. Its customers are satisfied, consistently use the service, and are willing to pay for it, a rare feat in the online world. "WhatsApp's extremely high user engagement and rapid growth are driven by the simple, powerful and instantaneous messaging capabilities we provide," said cofounder and CEO Jan Koum in a statement.

Our take: *WhatsApp's success comes on the back of telecommunications carriers that—by our estimates—lose already \$7 to \$8 billion in SMS text revenues just due to WhatsApp. Facebook will give WhatsApp access to more resources and an even larger user base of 1.11 billion users, allowing it to accelerate its growth. With the addition of voice and video calling, WhatsApp is well positioned to kill billions of dollars of voice revenues very much like it killed SMS text revenues. Although the rise of OTTs will drive demand of data services that benefit telecommunications carriers, the loss of legacy voice/SMS revenues and cost of providing data connectivity make the economics for carriers challenging.*

If you can't beat 'em, join 'em

OTT firms, who benefit from the connectivity provided by telecom carriers, have always been considered a threat. Google, Facebook, Netflix, Skype, and WhatsApp are just some examples of companies that make their money based on the telecom industry's infrastructure, sometimes cannibalizing the services telcos provide. Until now, telecom providers have been trying to fight the threat by limiting access, slowing speeds, and creating their own competing services. But that strategy hasn't worked, so they're beginning to cooperate instead.

Netflix and U.S. cable provider Comcast announced a partnership whereby Netflix will pay to access Comcast's network directly. The deal will increase streaming speeds for Comcast users by as much as 30 percent, and Comcast will generate revenue that may offset infrastructure investment. Telcos are becoming



"Telecom providers have been trying to fight the treat by limiting access, slowing speeds, and creating their own competing services."

smarter by teaming up with OTT players, instead of fighting them. Their mutual success is dependent on friendly cooperation and collaboration, not fights that degrade service and customer satisfaction.

Our take: *This is a 180-degree turnaround from past years, which saw telecommunications companies seek to create their own services to compete head-on with OTTs. But met with limited success, some players like Comcast realize that they would rather seek cooperation than try to compete or impede services like Netflix. Telcos may have finally realized a grand tenet of customer strategy—it's not about finding customers for your products, it's about finding the right products for your customers that meet their needs and serve them where and how they want to be served.*

Devices everywhere

Consumer electronics giant Samsung unveiled its new flagship phone the Galaxy S5, powered by the Google Android operating system. But more notable is Samsung's continued push into wearable technology with its updated smart watch line-up and new fitness band Gear Fit. With its marketing and distribution might, Samsung could drive adoption of yet another form factor of mobile devices into the mainstream. To power their new slew of devices, Samsung is set to introduce new digital services such as its music service Milk Music, following the footsteps of Apple's iTunes.

Noticeably absent from the conference was Apple, which around the same time announced its first foray into automobile operating systems, set to power the next generation of cars from Ferrari, Mercedes Benz and Volvo.

Our take: *The show was full of wearable gadgets and embedded Internet-enabled devices. All of these products and services reflect that the "telecom" industry is expanding into other areas of our lives. Telecom is actually everywhere. Innovators are pushing boundaries, and traditional companies will need to keep up. Tomorrow's digital, phablet, tablet, laptop, smart watch, fitness band and mobile phone-wearing, digital consumers will require ubiquitous connectivity for all of their devices. At a minimum, this creates an opportunity for telecommunications carriers to provide data connectivity to consumers everywhere. But the bigger opportunity might be in providing commerce, entertainment, information, and other services to consumers. The question is which players in the digital ecosystem will step in to fulfill the needs of the multi-device wearing digital consumer?*

Conclusion

What is notable about MWC this year is the lack of innovation coming from telecommunications carriers, and how everyone else in the digital ecosystem is innovating around them at light speed. Old school telco CEOs are still debating how to protect their oligopolies by challenging regulatory regimes around net neutrality. At the same time, digital CEOs in their 20s are creating services that generate billions of dollars of value nearly overnight. It is clear that legacy voice and SMS revenues are set to disappear in a few years. The question is who will develop and benefit from the emerging data services? 2014 was yet another year in which OTTs clearly show who is driving the bus. They lead 2:0 over telcos.

"Tomorrow's digital, phablet, tablet, laptop, smart watch, fitness band, and mobile phone-wearing, digital consumers will require ubiquitous connectivity for all of their devices."

Adapted from *1to1media.com*

Executive Q&A: Verizon's Secret Weapon for Next Level Marketing

Chris Hansen, associate director, digital design & development, Internet sales operations at Verizon, talks to 1to1 Media about the company's strategy for adapting to the shifting mobile, multichannel customer landscape.

With more than 1,700 retail outlets in the U.S. and more than 101 million wireless customers, marketing strategies at Verizon must take a disciplined, omnichannel approach to engaging customers.

Through the use of Adobe Marketing Cloud, its internal collaboration efforts, and staying true to the company's goal of delivering the right experience to the right customer at the right time, Verizon is successfully sending dynamic, personalized messages to customers over myriad devices. Chris Hansen, associate director, digital design & development, Internet sales operations at Verizon, discusses the inner workings of the company's omnichannel marketing efforts.

1to1 Media: Over the past couple of years marketing has had to rapidly evolve as customers' changing digital and device habits have changed. How has this evolution influenced Verizon's marketing efforts?

Chris Hansen: Being in the industry that we're in, the marketing and device strategy has changed so much that we had to quickly adapt to what our customers needed. At Verizon, we strive to stay ahead of the curve and offer up what the customer needs and wants from us and adapt our marketing strategies to be mobile-first.

1to1: How has mobile impacted the way Verizon approaches its marketing campaigns? How has the multi-device phenomenon impacted your efforts?

CH: We're broken up into multiple areas. When it comes to mobile, we recognize that that it is an area where the industry is going and where society is going in terms of being connected all the time. We attempt to market and drive our strategy toward providing the right support and the right sales opportunities in any given channel. Working with an omnichannel approach right now allows any given touchpoint to integrate with the customer.

1to1: What does omnichannel mean to Verizon and how are you developing your strategy to deliver on this growing trend?

CH: There are multiple campaigns going on to ensure we offer up the customer what they need when they need it. For us, connecting all those touchpoints along the way...is really to ensure we are delivering an end-to-end experience for the customer and not dictating *what* they need but *when* they need it at any given time.

1to1: How is the organization working collaboratively to deliver an omnichannel approach?

CH: My team works closely with TV and the print side of the house to ensure that the roadmap of where our campaigns are going is integrated as tightly as possible so we are truly one Verizon across the board.

1to1: We hear a lot about the necessary union between marketing and IT. Is this happening at Verizon and, if so, what's been the resulting benefit of this partnership?

CH: We have a strong partnership with our IT department. We are a collaboration of marketing and technical so our relationship with IT is extremely strong because we know we have to work together to be successful. As easy as it is to be siloed, we have to break down the barriers. We have marketing folks sitting in IT and IT folks sitting in marketing to have that cross pollination.



“At Verizon, we strive to stay ahead of the curve and offer up what the customer needs and wants from us and adapt our marketing strategies to be mobile-first.”

– Chris Hanse, Associate Director, Digital Design & Development, Internet Sales Operations, Verizon

1to1: You have more than 100 million customers. How is Adobe's Marketing Cloud helping you to facilitate your multichannel marketing approach with customers?

CH: We have a strong partnership with Adobe and have a number of (the company's) products. The products that make up Adobe Marketing Cloud are extremely important to how we do business. The tools we have from Adobe allow us to be faster to market and also provide what the customers want when they want it. It's an important piece of our infrastructure. If I look at the overall integration of profiles and dynamic tag management...those things will allow us to dynamically serve up more creative and offers that are personalized. Part of our responsibility to customers is to understand what their needs are. With their permission and our available opportunities, we serve them the experience they expect.

1to1: How is Verizon ensuring it delivers those experiences consistently across a consumer's multiple devices?

CH: We are actively doing that today. We are serving all those assets across multiple devices and we're able to launch things faster. We're able to deliver the same experience in some ways and differently in others depending on the devices that they have. We have a mobile-first methodology moving forward and we have to adapt in that sense.

1to1: How are you delivering dynamic personalized experiences for customers?

CH: We have all the tools necessary to do so but it's about tying all those tools together. The new (Adobe Experience Manager) 6.0 will help us connect those dots. We are able to personalize messaging based off different parameters at different times and customize those messages. It's based off all the data we gather.

1to1: Today's marketers are tasked with being data scientists. How do you ensure with all of the added responsibilities of your staff that creative doesn't fall by the wayside?

CH: We've taken a strong approach lately to have data drive most of our decisions. When it comes to creative...we have to continue to make that connection with our customers so the creative aspect of it along with the promotional messaging has to work hand in hand. We can't do one without the other. Part of my responsibility is being creative so we're very much in tune with that to ensure the creative matches the quality. In that way we speak to the customer.

1to1: What's in store for Verizon in the coming year? How will you plan to advance the customer engagement strategies you have in place?

CH: Truly it's personalization. We have to get better. Because things change so fast we have to keep adapting and being as flexible as we can be but we have to do it in a way that is respectful to our client base. Because we have 103 million customers, it's getting to the multi-device scenario. One of the goals of Verizon is to continue to engage our customers in our brand, provide them with the information they need when they need it, and personalize their experiences to ensure they're tailored to them.

1to1: What challenges do you expect to face along the way?

CH: The biggest challenge we face is not to feel like the messaging is creepy. We want to be cognizant of our customers' data. We want to make sure we're not doing things that are disrespectful. I can see how it can be perceived to where people are almost tracking you in that sense. It's really about the right time and the right place. It's not the second you hit submit, we're going to have to test our way into it. It's when do we approach the customer the next time and how often and with what messages. It's about finding the right balance and understanding where those critical touchpoints will affect our business.

Adapted from *1to1media.com*

Five Customer Loyalty Fixes for Telecom Companies

Telecom companies must boost their investments in providing a great customer experience or risk facing declining customer loyalty in the coming years. Here are five actions they need to take now to stay competitive.

When was the last time you heard someone rave about an experience they had with their Internet, television, or mobile phone service providers? Going by numerous sentiment-measuring reports, the likelihood is that such an occurrence is very rare.

Let's change the question around: When was the last time you heard someone complain about their experience when dealing with a telecommunications company? The likelihood is that we don't have to think long and hard to remember about a poor experience that we've heard or read about.

Despite the telecom industry's cutthroat market environment in which brands steal competitors' customers by buying out existing contracts and constantly undercut rate plans to get customers to switch, few have made customer centricity a priority. This shortcoming is evidenced by the industry's low Net Promoter scores in Satmetrix's recently released 2014 Net Promoter Industry Benchmarks. With a score of 39, Tracfone had the highest NPS among cellular phone service companies, while DirectTV's NPS of 34 ranked it highest among cable and satellite television providers. Bright House Networks' NPS stood at 20, even though it was the top-ranked company among Internet service providers. To put these scores into perspective, USAA gained NPS scores in the 80s for banking, automotive insurance, and home and contents insurance.

Further, television and Internet service providers were among the companies receiving an average of "poor" ratings in the 2014 Temkin Experience Ratings.

So why are customer experience metrics for telecom companies continually low? And more importantly, why does it seem like there have been no customer strategy advancements despite the constant threat to their customer loyalty? Perhaps it's because they're all in the same boat. "The best-in-class companies are not faring much better than those that are ranked at the worst positions," Chris Burton, senior vice president for communications, media, and technology at TeleTech, notes.

Traditionally, telecom providers have looked at cost and coverage as two of the main areas of investment. In fact, even marketing messages seem to target these two factors as main differentiators. Verizon, for example, uses maps of the United States to compare its 4G LTE coverage with coverage areas of other providers.

But in an intensely competitive market, where companies are constantly trying to one-up their competitors, lack of investment in customer-centric measures is seeing clients considering other companies, with some actually pulling the trigger and making the move. While cost and coverage are important factors for customers, on their own, they are not enough to avoid churn. "It's no longer enough to just be the cheapest offer," notes Martin Morgan, Openet's director of marketing. As Don MacNeil, CMO for Xo Communications, explains, in today's uber transparent market, customers can easily find out more about the companies they're doing business with and also about their competitors.

Further, even though many customers are tied down by contracts, a negative customer experience could very well drive them to a competitor once their contract is up, if not before. T-Mobile, for example, is even offering to pay the much-dreaded early termination fees of customers who want to switch carriers for their postpaid plans. If other companies follow suit, customers will have the option to break their contract anytime their current provider fails to deliver on their expectations, or they come across a better offer. Experts share five actions that telecom companies should take to attract new customers and retain existing ones:

1. Move towards a customer-based focus: Organizations across all industries suffer from departmental silos. Especially when customers buy more than one service from a company, it's imperative that the organization makes the necessary investments to create a 360-degree profile of its customers. As Burton explains, some telecom companies are trying to consolidate their CRM systems to have a more holistic view of their customers and enable the delivery of better customer service. Further, improved customer visibility will allow telecom providers to reiterate what other industries have been doing for some time—offer services and products that best fit an individual or a household's needs. "They need to steer away from the one-size-fits-all



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– Chris Burton, Senior Vice President, Communications, Media, and Technology, TeleTech

approach and instead offer products and services that address the needs of different segments,” notes Michelle Nowak, vice president of product management at CSG International.

2. Invest in first-contact resolution: Customers want their problems addressed and rectified immediately. However, as Burton notes, many telecom providers rate poorly when it comes to first-contact resolution, reflecting negatively on their customer satisfaction scores. There are a number of steps that companies can take to resolve issues immediately, including investing in training for contact center agents and providing agents with access to the information they need to give customers the answers they need. Ryan Pellet, senior vice president for strategic consulting services at Nexidia, also recommends using insights from contact center calls to determine what is making customers unhappy and making them want to churn. Information from individual calls, he notes, needs to be put in context of the relationship between a client and the company to better understand whether this is the first time that particular customer had a problem or whether this is a recurring complaint.

3. Focus on an omnichannel experience: With customers communicating with brands over multiple channels, organizations need to make sure that they can connect these different touchpoints and provide continuous experience across the board. While brands are trying to provide new ways for their customers to get in touch with them, the different channels are often siloed. Burton uses the example of a customer who starts an inquiry with a company by engaging with chat support when he realizes that the issue is complicated and he would rather get on the phone with an agent. “But many times there is no direct way to connect to the agent, and when the customer finally navigates the provider’s IVR maze, he’s often connected with someone new who doesn’t have visibility into the chat conversation.” In order to improve the experience, telecom companies need to consider investing in technologies like unified communications platforms and the cloud, as well as unifying the organization internally to connect the disparate channels and provide seamless transitions for customers.

4. Provide proactive warnings and information: In today’s connected world, customers expect to be able to communicate anytime and anywhere. Loss of a wireless connection or Internet access is, for many people, an experience they will go to extremes to avoid. Nowak says one service that telecom companies should invest in is warnings and alerts when customers are about to reach their data limits. This, she notes, is especially important for those on shared plans who might not know how much data others in the group have used. “Use real-time data to notify customers about what they’re buying and what they’re consuming,” Nowak recommends. Ulla Koivukoski, senior vice president for Comptel’s analytics business unit, agrees. “We need to proactively reach out to a customer before he calls us,” she notes.

Organizations should go a step further and use such opportunities to inform customers of other plans that might fit their needs better. “Understand their needs, quantify them, and offer them the right services.” Koivukoski uses the example of Bangladesh-based pre-paid mobile provider Robi Axiata, which is leveraging data to determine what services customers need and then letting them know about the packages that make the most sense to them. Further, Morgan highlights that these offers need to be timely. “If a customer is using his mobile phone to watch a video and encounter a problem with data, send him a message with an offer to make up for that issue,” he recommends. “Apart from being relevant, an offer needs to be timely or it will stop being relevant.”

5. Identify high-value customers: While all customers are important, there are certain segments that are more valuable than others. Telecom companies need to first determine the attributes of their high-value customers and then identify these clients. The next step, Burton notes, is to determine who, among this group, is most likely to churn, for example those clients who are approaching the end of their contract. Not only can organizations make sure these segments are routed to higher tier agents who can provide a better experience, but they should put structures into place to proactively reach out to these customers with relevant offers and information. For example, a cable company which knows that a particular household enjoys watching movies might offer that account a month of free movie channels or credit to use towards the purchase of on-demand movies.

Acquiring new customers is neither easy nor cheap. This is why organizations need to make sure those new customers are satisfied enough to want to continue doing business with the brand. Otherwise, companies are in for an endless cycle of acquisition without retention, a practice that will drain their coffers.

Adapted from *1to1media.com*

Executive Q&A: The Power of Optus' Virtual Agent

Chris Smith, the head of online for the telecommunications company, discusses the correlation between the company's virtual agent and customer empowerment.

Busy customers have become increasingly interested in finding ways to self-serve. In fact, as this 1to1 Media article highlights, automated self-service is a growing global trend. Forward-thinking business leaders have recognized the need to provide self-service capabilities, not only because their customers are requesting them, but also because they help lower the company's service costs.

Optus, a teleco provider in Australia and New Zealand, is one company that has embraced this trend and made the necessary changes to provide customers with the ability to self-serve through a virtual agent, which the brand introduced in May 2013.

As Chris Smith, the company's head of online, explains, the Optus Virtual Agent is designed to answer simple and commonly asked questions that don't require live agent response. "She's here to empower our customers to go online and resolve their low-complexity queries on their own," he notes.

Further, the interface, developed by IntelliResponse, allows customers to also see the top trending topics on the same page, including other customers' questions. "Ultimately, the virtual agent benefits all customers as she manages simpler queries, freeing up agents in other areas like web chat and the call center to handle more complex questions," Smith notes.

In this interview with 1to1 Media, Smith talks about the benefits of the virtual agent and the self-service trends that Optus is seeing.

1to1 Media: Can you share the recent self-service trends that you've been seeing?

Chris Smith: We're definitely seeing self-service increase as more customers have more options and choose different channels depending on their needs. Web chat on mobile is proving incredibly popular – we've even heard stories of customers using this while they're in meetings at work. Finally, agility is becoming more important for our customers as they start conversations in one channel and then finish the interaction in another.

1to1: What do you attribute to customers' increased propensity to want to self-serve?

CS: We know customers want to be in control and have the flexibility to manage their needs when and how they want. They may not have time to call up the call centers and go into a store so they prefer to self-serve. Above all, customers expect rapid, accurate, and consistent answers.

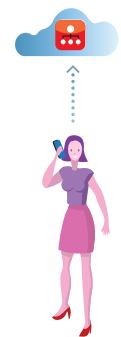
1to1: Can you share some figures that highlight the move to self-service?

CS: Before we introduced the Optus Virtual Agent on our "Contact Us" page, more than 70 percent of consumers chose not to use or weren't aware of our self-service options and instead called our call centers. Now, less than 39 percent choose to call, leaving the other 60 percent to self-serve online.

1to1: How is the virtual agent helping improve the customer experience?

CS: The Optus Virtual Agent answers questions using natural language, so it's really easy for customers to use. They simply type in a question the way they would verbally ask it and get an instant response. If customers need more help, the virtual agent offers Chat with a live agent transferring the history of the customer's journey to the live chat agent so that the customer doesn't have to repeat what they have done so far.

1to1: The Optus Virtual Agent has been asked more than 3.6 million questions since it was launched



"We're definitely seeing self-service increase as more customers have more options and choose different channels depending on their needs."

–Chris Smith, Head of Online, Optus

less than a year ago. Can you share the most popular questions?

CS: As she was originally only located on the “Contact Us” page until recently, not surprisingly her most popular question was “How do I contact Optus?” In November 2013 the Optus Virtual Agent was moved to the Help & Support area of the site. Here are the most popular self-service questions: When does my mobile contact end? How do I use My Account? I forgot my password. How do I contact Sales? What mobile plans do you offer? I’d like help with my Home Broadband modem setup. How do I pay my bill? How do I change my plan? I need help using my mobile or tablet? How do I check the balance of my bill?

1to1: How much quicker is asking a question to the virtual agent compared to contacting the call center?

CS: The virtual agent responds instantly whereas it takes longer calling the call center and going through the recorded options to get to an agent.

1to1: Can you also explain how this is helping Optus reduce service costs?

CS: Cost savings are achieved through call deflection and decreased volumes through our call centers. We’ve also recently refreshed our website, www.optus.com.au and mobile app, which will hopefully drive more customers to self-serve.

1to1: Has this system helped improve satisfaction among call center agents by reducing the number of simple questions that get directed to them?

CS: We have retrained our call center agents to help them to better problem-solve customer issues. We’ve removed a lot of our old metrics like call handling time so agents can focus on solving problems the first time around. The Optus Virtual Agent helps with this by reducing simple questions so the agents can focus on the more complex ones. Our Web chat agents are now well aware of the virtual agent tool and later this year we will make it available on all agent consoles.

1to1: Does the system learn from customers’ questions? If so, how has it evolved since you implemented it?

CS: Yes the virtual agent is self-learning. When we first launched, the Optus Virtual Agent was able to return a response to manually entered questions 78 percent of the time. Now, 94 percent of customer questions return an answer with a 93 percent accuracy rate.

1to1: Can you share any future plans to improve self-service?

CS: We recently added a virtual agent to our Help & Support section of the Optus site and we may add in the Optus Virtual Agent avatar this year. We’re also looking at adding things like Facebook integration, assisted form filling and integration with the My Optus App.

Adapted from *1to1media.com*

T-Mobile Embraces Online Customer Care to Strengthen Loyalty

By blending its social support strategy with its emerging live chat channel, T-Mobile's enhanced, consistent service spans across all touchpoints to ensure quick resolutions and customer satisfaction.

Loyalty and trust are often the result of an open, honest relationship that allows room for growth. Yet, while that might sound like the recipe for success in the personal realm, these elements weigh heavily on the longevity of brand relationships, as well.

In March 2013, T-Mobile launched its "un-carrier" initiative, which was designed to free customers from the standard obligations of the wireless industry by eliminating yearly contracts and early termination fees. Thus, in doing so, customer loyalty became an even more critical focus, as the nationwide brand sought to offer world-class customer service across all touchpoints.

"By freeing our customers from contracts, we have given them the option to walk away from our service at any time, for any reason," says Jen Palmer, director of knowledge management and social media service. "If we don't provide the service our customers want, expect, and deserve, they can leave us. So it's our responsibility to consistently earn our customers' loyalty by resolving their issues and providing the best experience in our services, our offers, and across all customer interactions, whether it's in store, over the phone, on social media, or through online chat."

Just as T-Mobile chose to change, the wireless carrier also recognized a shift in consumer behavior, as more customers took to the Web to find information and request service. However, the company's social success outpaced its live chat options, thereby leading to its latest analytic innovation. T-Mobile chose to apply the customer service lessons learned in social, such as communicating effectively and solving problems through text-only conversation, directly to chat. By redirecting its internal focus to examine and align with consumer behavior, T-Mobile planned to optimize the company's holistic online engagement program through its data-driven, analytical approach to understanding customer interactions. Thus, the brand moved to develop the right partnerships, processes, and tools to execute this endeavor efficiently, ultimately bringing the channels together, aligning resources, and providing a better, more consistent customer experience across channels.

By partnering with TouchCommerce, T-Mobile created a systematic, repeatable approach to benchmarking the quality of customer chat experiences and monitoring real-time chat volumes, enabling the carrier to efficiently staff agents and reallocate resources as demand dictates. The core objective of this partnership aimed to provide enhanced customer analytics and reporting, enabling T-Mobile to seamlessly gauge whether the right customer service agents are involved and if representatives are properly empowered to do their job. T-Mobile also wanted to determine why customers were contacting the company and evaluate their experience with the chat team in an effort to understand consumer behavior and empower service agents with the insights necessary to be more available and responsive to online inquiries.

T-Mobile adopted a new internal motto—listen, engage, and resolve—while the social support team adopted its newfound responsibilities, as the brand believed it would be beneficial to blend best practices from social to improve chat. The carrier then focused on two central metrics to quantify its understanding of the customer experience and apply said data to measure performance and make decisions.

While the myVOC score represents insights from customer surveys, the GRE score evaluates courtesy, concern, and resolution based upon internal chat transcripts. Each metric provides T-Mobile with a more holistic view of the customer experience, allowing the company to identify opportunities for improvement. As a result of T-Mobile's live chat advancements, myVOC scores increased by 0.2, while GRE internal quality measurement scores jumped +0.1. In return, the average customer wait time decreased by two minutes, average handle time decreased by 150 seconds, and resolution rates grew by 6 percent.



"It's our responsibility to consistently earn our customers' loyalty by resolving their issues and providing the best experience in our services, our offers, and across all customer interactions."

—Jen Palmer, Director of Knowledge Management and Social Media Service, T-Mobile

Adapted from *1to1media.com*

DIRECTV PanAmericana Enhances Analytics to Drive Conversions and NPS

By developing its single-view customer profile approach, DIRECTV PanAmericana can now pinpoint the early signs of churn as the brand works to reengage and transform detractors into promoters.

As the leading satellite television provider for Latin America and the Caribbean, DIRECTV PanAmericana serves nine territories, reaching more than 17 million customers with its exclusive content, excellent customer service, and continuous deployment of the latest entertainment technologies. Yet, while information plays an essential role in any business, the huge increase in consumer data required DIRECTV to reconsider how it analyzes, classifies, and stores this information in an effort to continue providing the best entertainment experience possible.

Ultimately, DIRECTV aims to always surprise its customers at every point of contact by remaining vigilant of their evolving expectations. Thus, in 2011, DIRECTV partnered with SAS to implement an integral business analytics solution that answers numerous questions about the organization: *Which customers are likely to churn and what factors lead to their decision? What are the main drivers behind customer satisfaction and how do promoters and detractors impact the bottom line? Is the brand upholding its promises and performing as expected across all touchpoints? Does DIRECTV recognize employees' efforts in relation to customer impact and do these employees understand how their roles influence the customer experience?*

Because many of these questions had yet to be answered, DIRECTV created an analytical roadmap that served as the foundation for its Pan Regional ACE (Analytical Center of Excellence). This program was designed to both promote the use of analytics and to support the end-to-end analytical needs of the entire company. Though DIRECTV boasts an array of experienced, qualified employees, the company failed to capitalize on their knowledge by providing a platform where they could share their experiences with one another, thereby repeating mistakes and reducing accuracy. Thus, to alleviate confusion and enable sustainable decisions, the ACE was designed to address technology, consulting, education, and administration within the context of the business to analyze and reveal any shortcomings.

For instance, DIRECTV was able to identify and rectify the average employee's lack of information and analysis capabilities. By implementing the SAS tools and training key users, employees gained easier access to user-friendly data, achieving enterprisewide analytics support. Said tools also enabled users to view information from different sources and countries on one platform, thereby providing analysts with the necessary information to make their work more time efficient.

DIRECTV's findings also revealed the need for contact automation, which allows the company to reduce unnecessary contacts, such as calling valued customers during collection campaigns, and increasing necessary contact, such as reengagement calls to those at high risk for churn. Voice of the customer text mining enabled the provider to dive even deeper into customer opinions, uncovering the drivers behind satisfaction and the problems that create detractors. DIRECTV's underlying goal to convert detractors into promoters remains at the center of its strategy, for these extremes can have varying impacts on the bottom line.

Detractors, overall, are 110 percent more likely to churn voluntarily, each costing the company \$204, while promoters carry 2.5 times greater value than detractors. However, since building out its business analytics abilities, DIRECTV saw Net Promoter Score increase by 1.1 percent and churn improve by 0.2 percent in 2013 alone, highlighting the solution's success and its promise for the future.



Since building out its business analytics capabilities, DIRECTV saw Net Promoter Score increase by 1.1 percent.

Adapted from *1to1media.com*

Portugal Telecom Gives Customers Content Control

By allowing customers to create and broadcast their own TV channels, Portugal Telecom fosters engagement and brand loyalty through its innovative entertainment platform, which subscribers can't find anywhere else.

Though television may traditionally be considered one-sided, technology continues to alter our perceptions of even the most common mediums. For Portugal Telecom (PT) customers, television has become the brand's primary differentiator, as the introduction of MEO Kanal, its personalized broadcast platform, allows clients to build and broadcast their own TV channel, which they can easily share with friends and family, or all MEO customers.

"Breaking through technological barriers, with support from the MEO infrastructure of PT's television, each client can now have his or her own TV channel—a capability that, until now, was only accessible to large corporate producers and distributors," says Celso Martinho, director of technology. "The thinking behind the development of this service was to give a TV channel to each customer and bring them a new way of TV viewing."

During the development and design process, the PT team focused on the consumer's need for simplicity, thereby basing its approach upon client expectations. Thus, after countless focus groups and several internal beta versions in collaboration with SAPO, MEO Kanal launched in February 2012, with the intent to boost customer acquisition, retention, and loyalty. By putting content creation in the clients' hands, PT sought to reinvent the television experience while creating brand awareness. To increase word-of-mouth, PT even encouraged employees throughout the organization to use the service and share their channels with family and friends by launching an internal challenge that urged the staff to record unforgettable moments during their summer vacations. The best channels were then rewarded based upon the total number of views and overall creativity.

PT also created numerous demo channels, featuring high quality videos from popular sportsmen, comedians, and musicians, to demonstrate the appeal of this innovation, along with the quality and attractiveness of the service. These demos served as inspiration for thousands of new public channels from local musicians, entertainers, and sports teams looking to highlight their talents, as well as local TV channels and newspapers looking to migrate to video. Even churches and political candidates have embraced MEO Kanal, for they recognize that having this direct channel allows them to reach new audiences that were previously inaccessible.

However, roughly half of all MEO Kanal channels are private, as families and friends can share videos and photos with one another. Creators need only establish their PINs to maintain security and ensure their content remains private. Corporate clients that choose to use the platform as a commercial vehicle, on the other hand, have access to premium features via MEO Kanal's paid version. Enabling clients to share such content quickly and easily with whomever they choose augments the TV viewing experience, while also incorporating some social flavor.

"This service has changed the way the television is used and this is one of its major breakthroughs," Martinho adds. "MEO Kanal is the closest thing we have to social media on TV, but keeping the experience of standard TV channel visualization."

The development and project management teams continuously work together, enabling their motivated workforce to maintain the service's high quality standard, while managing the brand's roadmap, resource allocation, and customer care process. By using daily and weekly dashboards, the management team remains up to date on audience trends, the number of channels created and hours of video uploaded, the number of unique viewers, churn rate, and all other relevant KPIs. New features, such as the clients' desire to broadcast live events, are often the result of both customer suggestion and constant analysis of service usage, for the company's roadmap revolves around what PT's growing audience and channel creators



"This service has changed the way the television is used and this is one of its major breakthroughs."

– Celso Martinho, Director of Technology, Portugal Telecom

value most. Big Data analysis also allows PT to deliver customized content to customers based on the millions of interactions collected, processed, and analyzed, as the company works to align its offerings with clients' interests.

Overall, those clients who post their content on the MEO Kanal platform are more loyal than regular customers of the MEO IPTV service standalone, which supports PT's ultimate goal to boost both loyalty and retention. PT's MEO Kanal channel creators and viewers have a lower churn rate (-2 percent) than MEO clients who have never used the service, resulting in improved customer satisfaction and engagement. Client behavior upholds this trend, for the daily time spent using PT's TV app averages 2 hours 25 minutes—almost half the time an average person spends watching TV in Portugal. Upon MEO Kanal's first anniversary, PT also dispersed a customer satisfaction survey to approximate Net Promoter Score results, culminating in an average 4.5/5. Today, MEO Kanal boasts more than 40,000 channels and 75,000 hours of content, and continues to grow daily.

Adapted from *1to1media.com*

Visualizing Video's Future in the Telecom Industry

Video has the power to educate consumers and employees, facilitate self-service, and promote products in engaging ways. Here, AT&T and Liberty Global demonstrate how video puts customers and employees in control.

Video truly engages the senses, for the sights, sounds, and motions are often more compelling than traditional text communications. From personal to professional pursuits, people simply gravitate toward video because the medium offers an intrinsic appeal and advantage over all other content types, for video allows companies and customers to convey much more complex information than can be shared in the average text document.

However, as video continues to weave itself throughout the consumer's daily activities, telecommunication and media companies are only on the cusp of integrating this medium into their overall strategies. For telecoms, video offers the opportunity to build engagement, thereby boosting loyalty and retention. However, for many, this means of communication remains underutilized, as brands slowly begin to adopt video as an essential component of their customer service strategy.

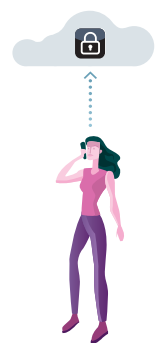
Tom Wilde, CEO of RAMP, notes that, in many cases, it's much easier for companies to shoot 90-second how-to videos than to provide consumers with lengthy, written instructions that may discourage and dissatisfy, ultimately increasing attrition. Because, as Wilde emphasizes, video has the power to do much more, as its nature facilitates verbal explanations and visual demonstrations, allowing telecoms to solve issues and address service problems succinctly and straightforwardly.

On the customer engagement side of the business, telecoms have the opportunity to use video in a way that informs and inspires. Video allows companies to promote services and products by providing customers with visual product tours. For instance, wireless carriers can demonstrate any given smartphone's or tablet's primary features through video demonstration, which becomes much more compelling than reading complicated side-by-side feature comparisons. By supplying this information clearly and concisely at the beginning of the customer relationship, telecoms are sure to establish an increased level of trust, loyalty, and overall transparency.

When it comes to customer satisfaction, video has the power to drive improved knowledge bases as consumers increasingly gravitate toward self-service. In many cases, customers have already created their own communities as they attempt to help one another solve problems that can't seem to be resolved via the given telecom's manuals or websites. Many such communities consist of crowdsourced how-to videos that demonstrate to the necessary steps for rectifying such issues as battery replacement or hardware installation—problems that these companies should offer solutions for themselves. By taking cues from what's already being said, telecoms can proactively provide consumers with their own how-to videos so as to strengthen the customer relationship and increase trust.

“Providing customers with easy access to product and service information has direct implications on brand satisfaction and perception,” Wilde says. “Taking the time to supply customers with what they want and need offers the brand itself an opportunity to look at what customers are posting themselves as they crowdsource to solve problems they cannot otherwise solve through the brand. By offering this information directly to aid self service efforts, such as video versions of the company's user manual, telecoms can increase loyalty by making it easier for customers to use and be successful with their products.”

On the employee side, video has the ability to educate and empower, for this medium can provide employees across the organization with the knowledge to improve the customer experience. Video tutorials can quickly teach technicians how to install equipment during training exercises or in the field in ways that may become lost in translation as written documents. Video can also help retail store employees understand the key features of the brand's most popular products, with tutorials that can teach them how to sell that given item successfully. This emerging medium can even facilitate collaboration and knowledge management, as telecoms look to diagnose problems remotely. The challenge, however, comes into play as companies work to make videos actionable internally. While text documents have been historically known



“Providing customers with easy access to product and service information has direct implications on brand satisfaction and perception.”

– Tom Wilde, CEO, RAMP

to generate leads and satisfy customer inquiries, telecoms must develop ways to move beyond video's potential brochure-like nature to solve business goals while supporting superior service and experience.

For New Customers, Video Fits the Bill

Though video adoption may still be in its infancy, numerous companies have tapped into this method of communication so they may educate customers about their bill. When new AT&T clients sign up for the company's U-Verse or mobile services, they are met with an individualized, personalized video that examines their current fees and charges. AT&T leverages SundaySky's SmartVideo technology to deliver the information new customers seek by sending video bills for the first two months. This format clearly introduces each customer to the brand's billing process and the charges they will incur each month, allowing them to retain these videos for future reference.

Because each video comes personalized, AT&T uses the customer's name and walks them through each element step-by-step so they know exactly what they're paying for and what they can expect to see as the relationship progresses. In particular, these videos come tailored to each customer's concerns, thereby steering clear of irrelevant generalizations in order to reduce confusion. AT&T also offers this video service to current clients that have recently made changes to their accounts to tackle billing questions that often arise. By preemptively answering customers' questions and addressing their concerns, AT&T not only reduces call center traffic, but also establishes the foundation for loyalty, as this transparent first impression will likely help boost retention and sustain satisfaction.

Watch this video to explore precisely what these video bills entail, including the personalized analysis of each charge:

Liberty Global, one of the largest international cable companies, operates similarly by providing new customers with an individualized, personalized video bill that examines their fees and charges, while also outlining essential information about their new accounts. With more than 24.5 million customers across 14 countries, Liberty Global aimed to enhance the customer experience while driving operational efficiencies. Using Idomoo's personalized video technology, this global brand offers clients first-time video bills so they may lay the groundwork for understanding and loyalty. Such videos highlight the customer's new services, his monthly payment due date, and current charges, all while emphasizing the company's on-site self-service offerings.

By encouraging site registration, Liberty Global demonstrates the level of power it puts directly in the customers' hands. Online accounts enable clients to expand upon the information learned through these introduction videos as they manage their accounts, order new services, view and pay their bills, and learn tips on how to get the most of Liberty Global's services. Not only does this strategy aim to reduce call center query volume and increase site registration, but it also sets the stage for an informed, empowered relationship. Giving customers control and transparency upfront will ultimately strengthen loyalty, advocacy, and retention down the road.

Watch this video to observe how Liberty Global's video bill works and how its clear, concise nature helps alleviate concerns:

Adapted from *1to1media.com*

CenturyLink Turns the Tables on NPS

The communications company just completed its first internal NPS survey to gauge the effectiveness of employees.

For more than 10 years, Net Promoter Score (NPS) has been used by organizations to measure and improve their customers' loyalty. Today, some companies are turning NPS on themselves as a benchmark for internal improvement.

CenturyLink, a communications and media company, for example, uses NPS as a metric to gauge the effectiveness of its internal processes, departments, and individual employees within them. The company completed its internal NPS survey in June and is currently analyzing the results.

Here, Jon Windley, vice president Business Customer Experience, discusses how the program works, the resulting benefits, and the company's plan to eventually link internal NPS with its customers' NPS.

When did you launch your VOC program?

We are early in the rollout of the employee piece of the entire customer experience program. We have a reasonable new NPS program for customers on the business side and we're just starting to roll out the full-blown program. The essence of it is in addition to the normal customer relationship surveys we're doing, we are just through the first deployment of four internal NPS surveys. We have a unique way of doing it. We are not doing it to get feedback on general things. What we asked employees to do is pick three internal organizations they work with on a regular basis and give them an NPS score and tell why they gave the score. What you then create is a picture of a specific group. We've done it for all the customer-facing organizations in CenturyLink.

What is the benefit of that?

You create a story around each of those teams. We have 90-plus organizations. Of those 90 organizations, 30,000 employees were invited to pick any of those groups and comment on a theme. This is a different approach to employee engagement. What we're trying to get at are several things, such as how well that team works with other teams. Ultimately, they're getting a sense of collaboration.

Are they required to give verbatim comments?

They aren't required, but boy do they. Roughly more than one-third of the employees filled out the survey with an average of three comments per employee. We had well over 30,000 comments.

How are those insights shared with the organization?

We have the customer experience team using Verint's Impact 360. Speech Analytics go through and look for significant word pairings, themes, and things that are significant. Then they slice and dice the data different ways. And then we look at it horizontally. We'll look at a particular product set and then something jumps out.

When we do the survey we ask, would you recommend this organization? And how collaborative are they? That's the essence of this survey. If we improve collaboration we will create a better customer experience. We also ask how well do each team's processes work and then we ask them to rate those processes. Also, how well do they communicate? The whole point is we are trying to create a picture for each organization for how the teams around them relate to them. The expectation is once you receive the information like the scores and verbatim comments for your teams, you will take your experience and you will create improvement plans. It's about, 'how can I get better?' In this case all analysis is local. It's about team themes. It's not about these global themes across the organization. We then ask each team to put together a one-page improvement plan for each organization.

We want each organization to get better. There's no recipe there. Some groups may get a negative num-



"We are trying to create a picture for each organization for how the teams around them relate to them."

—Jon Windley, Vice President, Business customer Experience, CenturyLink

ber here. It depends on what they think they need to do to create a better customer experience.

Is the intention to connect this with customer feedback?

The intention is to create what amounts to a relationship survey. We'll look for intersection points with customers to see if additional focus is needed in certain areas. Those are our next steps.

What tools and technologies are you using to analyze the feedback?

All the external and internal surveys are in the Verint platform. We use the VerintImpact 360 Speech Analytics tool to do the analysis. We also have a team of four going through the verbatim comments using keyword pairing.

Did you have a hard time selling this idea initially?

The executive team embraced it. There were no barriers.

What insights and outcomes do you expect as a result of these efforts?

The first is we absolutely expect to see improved collaboration across teams throughout the customer corridor and to get better at collaborating to support customers. The second thing is if we get this right our employees will be happy. They'll be better at their jobs and they'll get a better experience. Happy employees typically mean happy customers. If I do those two things...and I'm taking the information and trying to fix issues within organizations, I'll also have better processes. I'm taking this information to Six Sigma black belts to fix our processes.

What advice do you have for others considering such an approach?

Embrace the process because it's hard. You'll get feedback, but for some teams it will be difficult to hear and take action based on those insights. Anytime your employees are willing enough to help you, be willing to accept that information, take it to heart, and do something to make their experience a better one.

Are there mitigation plans in place for teams that score really low?

We are baseline. We'll do another survey next year and then look at the results. It doesn't really matter where your scores are the first time. Next year I want to see the scores improve. The beauty of this survey is that it's extremely hard to manipulate. It's the elegance of what we're doing.

Adapted from *Customer Strategist Journal*

Telstra Reaffirms Commitment to Customers, Gains Subscribers

The 100-year-old Australian telecommunications company focuses on building customer advocacy as its strategy for the next 100 years.

Telstra is a company with a longstanding commitment to technology and product leadership and it's in the midst of one of the most important transitions in its history—to put the customer at the center of its business. In recent years, Telstra's focus on industry leadership is evident in its substantial investment of billions of dollars into one of the world's fastest 4G mobile networks, as well as building a portfolio of new businesses and initiatives to improve capabilities in Australia and across Asia.

Its biggest transition, however, is to become more customer focused. Many companies give customer centricity lip service, but Telstra put its money where its mouth is, and has millions of new subscribers to show for it.

In its 2013 annual report, CEO David Thodey wrote, “we need to keep improving and going from strength to strength in everything we do. And that strength will come from how we serve our customers.” So far its plan is paying off. Telstra's Australian retail mobile customer base jumped from 12.2 million in 2011 to 15.1 million in 2013.

Peter Jamieson, a 30-year veteran of Telstra, has seen many of the company's ups and downs. He now serves as executive director of advocacy, overseeing the implementation and management of advocacy programs across Telstra. He recently spoke to *Customer Strategist* about how the operator is turning customer-focused talk into action.

Customer Strategist: Why differentiate on customer experience?

Peter Jamieson: Our history is one that has focused on products, engineering, and networks. We built a strong network on a tough continent. But products can only take you so far. We want to build off our legacy to be absolutely focused on putting customers at the center of everything we do. We want every Australian to become an advocate of the organization and talk differently [than they have in the past] about Telstra.

As a long-time employee, I've seen our attention to customers evolve. The passion for the customer has not always been at the surface, but it's been there. CEO [David Thodey] has made service improvement a priority, which has awakened a renewed sense of passion among employees.

The market is changing, and competitors are changing as well. More operators now share the same network infrastructure, so traditional network differentiation goes away. Customer service makes sense as a differentiator. An advocate will spend more, stay longer, and cost less over his or her lifetime. We are evolving to create advocates of all our stakeholders: customers, shareholders, suppliers, etc.

Discussions about creating customer trust and delivering a frictionless customer experience have really resonated with me. It's what we're ultimately striving for at Telstra.

CS: What are some examples of the customer experience initiatives you've put in place?

PJ: We started with the fundamental things. We moved to a 24/7 service model, instituted weekend field service and installations, and launched online self-service for simple transactions. The bigger issue was culture change. We want to help our employees feel as though they can do what's best for customers. Every single employee can help impact the customer experience.

We created a mobile app for employees called SNAPP App, where any employee can tap into the service organization to help resolve issues on the fly. It's designed for people who are away from work—at a barbecue or talking to friends and family—to be able to log a claim, send messages to relevant service groups, or escalate an issue to help resolve it. For example, one employee's sister-in-law moved to a new



“As a long-time employee, I've seen our attention to customers evolve. The passion for the customer has not always been at the surface, but it's been there.”

—Peter Jamieson, Executive Director, Advocacy, Telstra

place and complained that her initial connection appointment was delayed. The employee logged into the system, and moved up the service appointment by four days. The app allows employees to do something immediately to help customers. It also provides up-to-date information about the business, strategy, purpose, and other topical issues that may come up in conversation. So far, more than 19,000 employees have downloaded the app.

Internally, all employees are encouraged to meet for monthly “customer T-Time” meetings to discuss ways in which the business can improve customer service. More than 3,500 such meetings occur each month. Also, 8,000 supervisors and leaders have gone through customer-centric workshops, and the company has trained more than 3,000 customer service employees.

I’m proud that we can help people do the sorts of jobs they want to do, and be proud themselves to work for Telstra. If we allow people to serve customers well, they will do it. They just need to be empowered and have the right tools.

CS: You’ve also transformed your contact center operations. Can you describe some of those changes?

PJ: We were not delivering the best possible outcomes for our customers. Residual issues caused dissatisfaction and callbacks. Our teams were fragmented, causing a poor, inconsistent experience. The new strategy consolidated initiatives and locations to align around the customer. We fundamentally changed the way we worked. Now, we route calls to the most relevant agent, we discourage transfers, and we have broadened agent training so they can resolve more issues. There are no restrictions on call times, and first call resolution is a leading KPI. What we’re doing in the contact center is representative of what we’re trying to do in the whole company.

CS: What other metrics have you changed?

PJ: It was necessary to change the metrics to help align the organization. All metrics take a much harder look at the customer impact. The customer perspective gets measured, instead of being internally focused. Customer wait times in retail stores are a particular pain point, so we now measure in-store transactions along with customer wait times. First call resolution is measured. When measuring technician performance, we look at the number of jobs, but also how many were completed to the customer’s satisfaction. Also, we evolved our customer satisfaction metrics to now include Net Promoter Score, which has become pervasive across the organization. Last year we conducted 11 million NPS customer surveys to collect dynamic feedback from customers.

CS: What challenges have you come across during Telstra’s customer transformation?

PJ: One of the biggest challenges has been connecting the end-to-end customer experience, so customers feel that they can trust we’ll do what we promise we’ll do. We want to make it as frictionless as possible, so that it’s not up to the customer to figure out how to maneuver through the organization to resolve issues. That takes commitment and alignment from the entire company. Maintaining momentum, enthusiasm, and focus can sometimes be a challenge as well. It’s easy to get bogged down by day-to-day activities and lose sight of the overall customer vision. The monthly meetings and customer-based metrics help to keep focused.

CS: Telstra’s transformation led to customer growth of more than 1 million customers’ services, while competitors grew much more slowly or even declined. What about the program are you most proud of?

PJ: I’m most proud of the fact that we started a journey that’s changing the way people talk about Telstra. We’re staying the course, and truly embedding customer advocacy in our DNA. It’s a great journey with a lot of challenges, but it’s worthwhile. Earning and keeping customer trust in an organization so they become advocates is the key thing.

“One of the biggest challenges has been connecting the end-to-end customer experience, so customers feel that they can trust we’ll do what we promise we’ll do.”

—Peter Jamieson, Executive Director, Advocacy, Telstra



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About Peppers & Rogers Group

Peppers & Rogers Group is dedicated to helping its clients improve business performance by acquiring, retaining, and growing profitable customers. As products become commodities and globalization picks up speed, customers have become the scarcest resource in business. They hold the keys to higher profit today and stronger enterprise value tomorrow. We help clients achieve these goals by building the right relationships with the right customers over the right channels. We remove the operational and organizational barriers that stand in the way of profitable customer relationships. We show clients where to focus customer-facing resources to improve the performance of their marketing, sales, and service initiatives.

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