

What makes a call centre a good one?

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"Measuring customer satisfaction alone cannot guarantee that your contact centre is a good one," states Jon Salters, Managing Director of Synovate Sub-Saharan Africa. "The secret lies in firstly, measuring the right things - those that really make an impact on customers - and secondly, using the information on an ongoing basis and linking the measurement to an improvement in contact centres."

The release of the Merchants Global Contact Centre Benchmarking Report by Dimension Data has uncovered that 75% of contact centres are incorporating customer satisfaction into their strategy, however 12% of the sample still does not know what their overall customer satisfaction score is - measured in the Benchmarking study.

As the research supplier to the Merchants report, Synovate has scrutinised the results pertaining to customer satisfaction - an area in which we are well established in the South African market.

The customer satisfaction score for the top bracket reported this year saw a slight improvement from the last reading. 24% of the sample scored in the 91 - 100% category. But there is a substantial drop in the 81 - 90% group.

The overall mean score declined by one percentage point - not a statistically significant decrease - but the fact that it did not increase should raise alarms when taking into account that customer satisfaction has been reported as a major inclusion in call centre strategy.

Levels of customer satisfaction were highest in the financial services industry (86%) and lowest in travel and transportation (72%). Oddly enough however, the travel and transportation industry reports the highest measurement of customer satisfaction and financial services the lowest.

When looking at the results more closely, the reason for this seems to be that despite making a concerted effort to measure customer satisfaction, many industries are not actually using the results to drive a customer satisfaction strategy.

"There is no link between actually measuring customer satisfaction and basing action on this measurement," states Salters. "What contact centres need is a review of the measured attributes as well as ongoing monitoring and managing of the customer satisfaction programme. These are the building blocks of a customer satisfaction strategy."

Last year Synovate launched a customer satisfaction solution globally, specifically aimed at the call centre industry. This has been successfully implemented by a number of players in different industries and has resulted in significant improvements in independent customer satisfaction measures.

Viewscast captures the customers' opinions using technology that routes them to a recorded message after their interaction with a call centre agent. The customer is asked a few questions pertaining to satisfaction with the call. Answers are entered by customers using their telephonic keypad.

Real-time information directly from the customer is delivered to the call centre - making it easy to rectify any problems... quickly! The continuous monitoring and management of customer satisfaction data directly translates into improved satisfaction levels.

Salters commends the call centre industry for its renewed focus on customer satisfaction but suggests that the measurement of customer satisfaction be accompanied by its monitoring and management.

"Historically, call centres have been preoccupied with measuring operational metrics, such as the length of time to answer the phone, how long it takes to resolve a specific query, and other, cost-oriented measures. While this helps the call centre from a cost perspective, it makes no difference to those calling into the call centre - lost customers (often not quantified) may be the biggest cost."

As the front line of a company, a contact centre has significant bearing on a loyal and satisfied customer base.

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