

Customers Are Sick of Service, Literally

Consumers can get ill over bad service experiences, but there is a silver lining: Most of them buy more from a company because of a good service experience.

Customer frustration with poor service experiences is nothing new, but perhaps even more alarming is the physical reactions to bad experiences that have negative effects on customers. According to a RightNow Technologies' survey of 2,551 people conducted by Harris Interactive, 85 percent of respondents revealed that they've had customer experiences so dreadful that they've yelled, cursed, hit and broken things, gotten headaches, felt their chests tighten, and even cried. (RightNow conducted the analysis of the data.)

More specifically, of that 85 percent, 29 percent admitted to swearing when they've had a negative experience with a company. This was trailed by shouting, getting a headache (both tied with 21 percent), tightening of the chest (6 percent), crying (5 percent), and hitting/breaking something (3 percent). A mere 7 percent of respondents revealed that they have had a negative experience with a company before, but it didn't affect them or cause them to respond, while just 3 percent noted they never had a negative experience with a company, according to the survey.

However, the most popular way to illustrate dissatisfaction with a negative experience is to impact a company's bottom line by turning to other product and service providers: Sixty-eight percent of survey respondents noted that they've decided never go back to a company when they've had a negative experience, according to the survey. This approach, however, just barely topped registering a complaint or telling other about their bad experience (67 percent), while 59 percent revealed that they've cancelled service or returned the product.

When weighted specifically for U.S. consumers with Internet access consumers are most frustrated by not being able to reach a live agent via phone or Web (53 percent) when contacting a company for information, assistance or service. Respondents are almost as frustrated with not being able to understand the live agent (44 percent) as they are with being on hold, listening to bad music or repetitive messages (45 percent). The ability to locate information via Web or IVR also continues to cause consumer headaches: Thirty-nine percent of respondents are most frustrated by spending a great deal of time on a Web site or automated phone system searching for needed information and not finding it.

Here's some good news: Over the past five years 77 percent of respondents reported that overall they've had positive experiences, while 23 percent classified their overall experiences as negative, according to the results. Perhaps even more interesting is the impact the service experience can have on propensity to buy. Sixty-three percent noted that they usually buy more from a company because of outstanding service--surpassing lowest prices (60 percent) and best quality (59 percent)--to secure the top slot regarding why people give repeat business to a company.

To ensure a gratifying service experience some of the areas that companies must focus on are first contact resolution, providing customers with the option to connect with a live agent quickly, and streamlining the IVR menu navigation process. Providing adequate training on products and services and on customer service skills must also be at the crux of any customer service initiative. While 94 percent noted that they have had a less-than-positive experience with a company, 71 percent feel that it's usually attributed to companies inadequately training staff, and 54 percent contend that the culprit is usually because they don't care about customers. Many companies view customer service "as an expense rather than a way for them to generate more revenue," says Zohar Adner, stress release coach at Stop Stressing Out, a firm specializing in stress release and coaching services. But "every contact you have with a client is a potential sales opportunity. [Training is] an investment upfront, but it pays off in the long run."

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