

a MANA resource for principals and reps

agency sales[®]

JANUARY 2017
\$12.97

Independent Manufacturers' Representatives and the Global Economy

Selling to the Manufacturing Sector
in Other Countries: Focus Mexico

Can Your Principal
Not Pay Commissions and
Enforce a Non-Compete?

MANA Recognizes
Long-Term Members

Customer Service Hell is Spelled — **IVR!**

BY JOHN TSCHOHL



You have just entered
Customer Service Hell.
It's the phone call looped
through a frustrating
automated system known
as IVR (Interactive Voice
Response) — you know,
the one where you “Press 1
to continue in English”
and “Listen closely to our
list of options, as they
may have changed.”
Or, “Please call back
during our normal
working hours.”

Calling for Help

While automated phone attendants sound great for the business that's set one up, it's not ideal for a customer that just wants to speak to someone about a question, concern, scheduling of an appointment, or simply to learn about your services. It feels impersonal and makes customers think that you just don't have time to deal with their phone calls. Don't magnify the problem by creating a situation that wasn't so bad to begin with by having technology in charge of your customer's first impression. Having a human answering the phone with a friendly voice helps to handle issues quickly and professionally.

What happens when you keep an automated voice on the other end? You're going to end up costing yourself sales. There is no longer a welcoming voice that is eager to get a situation resolved and the call handled promptly; it's the same generic greeting, complicated menu to follow, and a frustrated caller deciding it's not worth the trouble.

Telephone — the Virtual Front Door to Your Business

There is no substitute for a friendly human voice, who answers the call promptly and appropriately. When



“You have a better chance at offering a superior level of service when a live person can help someone promptly and in a friendly way.”

— John Tschohl

someone calls your business, they want answers and incidentally, they may also want to purchase your product or service. Fact is, as customers don't run on the same time schedule as your business, you need to make every effort to have their concerns taken care of according to their schedule, not yours. Very few companies have 24/7 live people answering their phones thereby limiting their ability to attract new customers and keep old ones. Very few companies realize that the power of a live person answering the phone still matters! The following companies do:

- Metro Bank in London has 24/7 live customer service representatives.
- LL Bean has 24/7 live customer service representatives.
- Stew Leonard grocery stores have live customer service representatives during their open hours from 7 a.m.-11 p.m.
- Apple is an anomaly, you are connected with an IVR for a very short period of time. They answer the phone quickly and your telephone number alerts them who is calling, then they answer with, “Good Morning John, which of your Apple products are you calling about?” After which, you are connected to a live person.

How to Win Customers: Talk to Them

A phone greeter is the first impression of the company, the person that is going to answer general questions that may make an “interested” customer turn

into a “sold” customer, and the person that verifies details to make sure the customer gets their appointment scheduled or transferred to the person in the company that can help them best. I think businesses should treat the person that answers the phone as a part of the sales team.

An automated voice is such a deterrent that some customers won't wait to go through the prompts or listen all of the way through until they know which number to hit; they may simply hang up after feeling like they are just another number.

A welcoming voice, on the other hand, can make a person feel good, reflect well on the company, and make it easier for a solution to be found for the reason behind their call. Companies that treat their phone greeter like a salesperson may notice that taking the position seriously is a great way to boost sales and get prospective customers to do business with you.

Give 'em Something to Talk About

Get everybody customer-driven so if somebody walks in your business through the phone line, the Internet, or in person, the experience is “Awesome.” Your customers will feel much more important when they are handled by a human rather than an automated operator.

MANA welcomes your comments on this article. Write to us at mana@manaonline.org.

“I think businesses should treat the person that answers the phone as a part of the sales team.”



John Tschohl is an international service strategist and speaker. He is founder and president of the Service Quality Institute in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Described by *Time* and *Entrepreneur* magazines as a customer service guru, he has written seven books on customer service. The Service Quality Institute (www.customer-service.com) has developed more than 26 customer service training programs that have been distributed and presented throughout the world. His monthly strategic newsletter is available online at no charge. He can also be reached on Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter.