

The “Concierge” Customer Service Experience

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Is top-shelf Customer Service an art or a science?

Actually, it’s a bit of both.

It all starts with a review of what your Customers and Prospects are looking for, and how you can best provide them with rapid and comprehensive assistance through the best blend of people, process and platform (in that order of priority).

Prospects and Customers have different needs, but there are 2 common elements; a desire for Responsiveness, and a need for Answers.

RESPONSIVENESS

First, both are seeking an immediate response with specific answers to their questions. Whether the contact mechanism is a toll-free phone number, a live web chat, or an email inquiry, the first challenge is a quick professional response. For example, toll-free live answer rates should be 92-95% within 15-25 seconds. Traffic/staffing models such as Erlang (named after a Danish mathematician) are useful in building a resource framework.

A NEED FOR ANSWERS

Second, they want relevant and actionable information without getting bounced around or stuck in a queue. Some questions are basic, (request for product literature or dealer locations), others more complex (troubleshooting product issues and out of warranty support), but in all instances there should be useful information provided to enable prospects and customers to understand the next steps. Dynamic, ongoing training and evolving documentation are critical to successful Customer Commitment teams. And it must be balanced with empathy and analytical skill; the ability to adapt to unique situations.

PEOPLE, PROCESS and PLATFORM

When we evaluate the best people, processes and platform to provide a Concierge experience it should be through the prism of issue resolution, the ability to provide goodwill, and ultimately satisfaction and brand loyalty.

PEOPLE

Not everyone has the communication and problem solving skills to be a Customer Service Representative. A wonderful voice and polished image aren't nearly enough if the person cannot gather, process and provide information in real-time, under pressure from a potentially frustrated customer. This means that they'll need to access systems and be able to troubleshoot issues and provide immediate assistance wherever necessary/possible.

Within a Customer Commitment group, we recommend a tiered structure, with the first tier handling initial calls/cases and a second tier handling more advanced issues by region or product. And some level of goodwill authorization (service vouchers, etc) which could assist in one call/case resolution (specific guidelines and parameters would be established in advance).

PROCESS

Without clear guidelines and process (which should be constantly evolving and updated), CSR's cannot act in a Concierge capacity. Understanding what they can/cannot do according to clear company policies is essential.

A framework and the ability to reference potential solutions is critical to high-level customer service. In addition, it's necessary to be consistent in any customer issue resolution (since people post/read blogs and compare situations and outcomes) and a clearly defined process provides useful structure. Note that, in order to be effective, all process must be regularly reviewed and tested, re-written and incorporated into training, and easily referenced. And front-line Concierge CSR's must be encouraged to contribute feedback and actively exchange process ideas.

PLATFORM

Access to information and the ability to collaborate on solutions is the key to effective Customer Relationship Management systems. Wherever possible the platform should be simplified based on the necessary function (data capture, location look-up, reporting), such that it doesn't impede the goal of a Concierge Customer experience.

Careful review and discussion of situations; including time studies, resolutions and value, and a significant testing phase, will help to craft or select the most appropriate platform. And no platform or process should be hostage to the phrase "because we've always done it that way." Push the envelope, explore new methods and create a mentality to ensure the best people-process-platform. It's a journey, not a destination.

SUMMARY

A holistic approach is necessary to create a Concierge Customer Experience. It isn't one thing, but a combination of key elements that contribute to an environment where Concierge CSR's feel empowered and are able to perform at the highest level. Customers and Prospects respect and admire companies that are responsive *and* able to provide personalized solutions.