



Inspiring service desks to be brilliant

Improving The Customer Experience

Member Report

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About the Author

The author of this report is SDI's Industry Analyst Scarlett Bayes. Scarlett is dedicated to providing insightful and practical research to the service desk industry through investigating trends, analysing data and engaging with the IT service community. You can find more of Scarlett's work on the [SDI blog](#) and can follow her on Twitter [@SDIScarlett](#)

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Introduction

Customer Experience (CX) (or User Experience (UX)), and ensuring the experience of the people who contact the service desk is a positive one, has always been an essential part of being a service desk, yet often that can be neglected in the pursuit of achieving service level agreements or hitting performance targets.

When a customer contacts the service desk, they typically expect a certain experience during their interaction. Amongst other things, they expect their issues to be resolved within an agreed time frame, for their expectations to be managed in a professional manner, and a to be offered a consistent and courteous service. Managing and meeting customers' expectations is the first step in achieving better customer experience.

Knowing what customers expect is one thing, but what might a service desk do, or not do, that makes customers unhappy? Firstly, over-selling your services is one of the root causes of unsatisfied customers. For example, if an analyst takes a customer's call and promises to revert to the customer within an agreed time frame but does not deliver this, understandably the customer will be dissatisfied with their experience of the service. Customers may also become irritated when analysts simply do not exhibit the right attitude. Whether consciously or not, analysts may speak down to customers if an issue is frustrating to deal with. Furthermore, not making simple answers to issues easily accessible, for example in a knowledge base, is another possible reason for customers to be unhappy.

This report will look at how to satisfy your customers by detailing the ways in which you can improve your CX, and how technology plays a role in this. We will also explore whether SLAs are still relevant to service desk customers, or whether this will be replaced by a more customer-centric approach to service.

How To Improve Your Customer Experience

Effective communication is a key consideration. The most obvious thing to do is to communicate with your customers. For example, it is essential to effectively articulate changes to service, and fully inform your customers of how they will be affected. This will also allow you to glean an impression as to whether your customers are satisfied with your service, and if not, customers can give valuable insight and ideas of how the service could be improved. This also has the added bonus of making the customer feel valued, which can lead to a more engaging interaction and better CX. There are multiple channels you can use to communicate with your customers, including customer satisfaction surveys.

Monitoring and measuring the customer experience through a customer experience program can not only help to sustain and improve service quality and customer satisfaction but also develop customer loyalty, customer advocacy, create brand value and drive successful business outcomes. If done well, customer satisfaction surveys are one of the most effective ways to gain customer feedback about your service, and gain a better understanding of customer needs.

The most common types of customer satisfaction surveys conducted by the service desk are: ongoing, to measure the quality of a single interaction; annual or periodic, to evaluate the overall satisfaction levels with the service desk's products; and one-off, to evaluate satisfaction levels with current products and service offerings. The objectives of these surveys are to identify what customers feel is important, and understand whether the products and services offered by IT are meeting their expectations. This also allows for benchmarking and trending against customer satisfaction, in order to get an idea as to whether customers are generally having better experiences with the service desk or not, and whether the service desk is succeeding in improving the customer experience.

Surveys also allow service desks to identify areas for improvement. Another way to improve customer experience is by creating a culture of Continual Service Improvement (CSI) and a holistic, strategic approach to CSI. Creating a customer experience program that is aligned with organisational strategic objectives and focused on the customer's needs and demands, can not only support CSI but also build strong business relationships. By utilising feedback from customer satisfaction surveys to instigate measurable CSI initiatives, service desks have the potential to become fully customer-centric and optimise their service to suit their customers' needs, which can improve customer experience significantly.

How to improve your Customer Experience

Supplying your customers with a knowledge base is also a viable option to improve customer experience. In a less customer focussed organisation, it can be frustrating for a customer to contact the IT service desk to have a simple question answered, and have to queue for a call to be answered. Providing self-help through an effective knowledge base, can save time and cost for both the customer and the service desk, and could potentially improve CX.

Technology

If implemented and managed correctly, developing technologies, such as automation, self-service, and Artificial Intelligence, can be highly effective ways of improving CX. It is a well-known benefit that tools and technologies can alleviate basic and repetitive tasks from service desk analysts, which frees up time and resources from managing low value, repetitive workloads, and provides a greater focus on more proactive, technical and valuable tasks. This approach gives customers additional choice, i.e. using a self-service tool capability to log a ticket rather than call the service desk, with a potentially longer wait time to resolve an issue. This can translate to a better experience for the customer.

Self-help and self-service technologies are a good way to improve customer experience. Introducing a customer self-service portal will allow your customers to have access to 24/7 support, and certain incidents or service requests may be able to be resolved or fulfilled without the need for first line support. This also allows customers to log an incident or service request themselves and may allow for a faster resolution or fulfilment time.

Service automation and emerging AI technology can help to streamline the customer experience and provide end users with a simple way to find solutions. For example, if an end user logs an incident, a cognitive AI tool capability could automatically send a personalized response to acknowledge receipt, provide an estimated resolution time frame, or potentially guide the user toward relevant knowledge base articles. A similar process could be assigned to service requests, for example a cognitive AI capability could pre-approve simple service

requests, such as a request for a new laptop, in order to make the request process faster and easier for the customer. Furthermore, as the capability deals with the process from conception to either solution or escalation, there is potential for AI-integrated ITSM tools to draw insight based on historical data, to match users with accurate recommended resources, so they solve their incidents quickly and easily without the need for human intervention.

Offering multi-channel support is also a way to improve CX, as offering customers more choice means that they can select a support channel that best suits their needs. Offering additional support channels, however, may come at a cost, so ensuring the return on technology investment as well as the business value derived from such an investment is understood, is a key consideration as well as the impact on CX.

The key with any support channel, particularly with an aim to improve the customer experience, is to regularly review its efficiency and listen to customer feedback. Customer suggestions and feedback will enable you to continually alter your service to benefit your customers, which will have a direct positive impact on CX.

Managing Customer Expectation

Massive corporations such as Amazon or Apple are well renowned for providing an excellent level of customer service. As such, customers tend to expect this level of exemplary customer service in other aspects of their life; for example, from the IT service desk. Particularly where CX investment is limited or where a service is chaotically reactive, a high standard of customer service on par with big business may be unobtainable and unreasonable to expect. Nonetheless, it is essential to provide customers with the best possible yet reasonable level of customer service, whilst simultaneously managing customer expectations to ensure that CX is not jeopardised.

Managing customer expectations can be difficult with the competition and expectations derived from customer experience with large corporations. Furthermore, we have established that over-selling services can lead to dissatisfied customers; however, establishing Service Level Agreements (SLAs) can help by ensuring customers are aware of what to expect in terms of service. It is also important to communicate SLAs to end users and regularly review SLAs to ensure they remain relevant.

Will CX Be The SLA Of The Future?

SLAs help shape the service desks' relationships with their end users, providing agreed terms for supporting service delivery. Service desks are expected to meet the targets established within an SLA, such as average call wait time and call abandon rate. SLA targets are an excellent indicator of the success and efficiency of a service desk measured against these metrics. Metrics derived from targets can be used as a benchmark, and KPIs surrounding them can be used to improve the quality of service. Service desks often spend a lot of time and resources trying to meet or improve these figures, which could cause customer satisfaction, which may be harder to quantify, to take a back seat.

Customers may potentially be willing to forgo certain SLA control for a better experience during their interaction with the service desk. For example, if the service desk is unable to fix an incident within an SLA related to handling time, but the customer is happy with the service they have received and are therefore willing to wait longer for a resolution. Furthermore, if an analyst is aware of an approaching target resolution SLA breach, there may be pressure to circumvent a process step to resolve an incident, without communicating with the customer to check their issue was resolved to their satisfaction, and that the customer was happy to resolve the incident. This potential pitfall could be resolved with multiple KPIs; however, that approach can create a service that is metric centric rather than customer centric.

Furthermore, SLAs may not take into account CX across a variety of support channels. For example, an end user may use a self-help portal to resolve their issue, but their experience with the portal may have been poor. If, for example, a service desk's focus more on the telephony experience, it may not be fully aware of customer dissatisfaction with other channels of support.

Ultimately, dissatisfaction with alternative support channels could cause an increase in the amount of calls to the service desk, leading to a greater amount of time analysts spend fire-fighting, which defeats the purpose of alternative support channels, such as self-help. IT service management is becoming increasingly focused on CX and customer-centricity, and as such, non-customer focussed SLAs may become a thing of the past in order to put the customer at the centre of service.

Certainly, ensuring KPIs that are measured are not solely performance focussed but also how they work to enhance CX is imperative. Ask yourself, are you measuring the right things? If not, what do we need to start measuring to put the customer at the heart of the service rather than just performance driven SLAs; and how can your customers help define the right things to measure?

Conclusion

Customer experience is undoubtedly a major factor for service desks to consider, as dissatisfied customers can be detrimental to a service desk. Establishing effective communication channels with your customers is a valuable way to understand whether your service is satisfying their needs, and to identify areas for improvement. Effective multi-channel support can also be an effective method to improve CX, as the choice allows users preferences to be considered and can lead to customers feeling valued.

Managing customer expectations can be difficult, particularly when customer service expectations are continually increasing through the application of new technologies and the consumerisation of IT. However, service definition, setting guidelines and targets for support is the first step to ensuring that customers are aware of what to expect from the service desk. While this is typically done using SLAs, it is important to consider the fact that customer satisfaction can be hard to quantify; being unaware of customer satisfaction can be detrimental to a service desk, and has the potential to stunt any attempt to improve customer experience.

About SDI

The SDI company mission is to inspire service desks to be brilliant. To achieve this mission SDI has developed a set of goals by which it aims to inspire service desks to:

Embrace: To raise the quality of service delivery by valuing best practice

Engage: To create an inspiring and engaging customer experience

Invest: To empower their teams to be inspired, take action and be better

Shine: To demonstrate and deliver exceptional business value

SDI sets the globally recognised best practice service desk standards that provide clear and measurable benchmarks for service desk operations and professionals. The standards are designed to encourage service desks to embrace and value best practice in order to raise the quality of service delivery.

For more information about SDI please visit www.servicedeskintstitute.com

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