

customer experience spotlight

IT and technology: who comes out on top?

This month we called the sales and enquiry lines of some large hardware, software, and consumer technology companies, to evaluate the way in which they sell themselves, their brands, and of course their products and services.

Particularly attentive spotlight readers will notice that this month's sector league is significantly shorter than usual, with 12 rather than the usual 20 companies being assessed. There are also some significant household names from within the IT and technology sector missing from the league.

So why the omissions? Well, put simply, when the spotlight team came to research the sector and identify target companies, we struggled to find 20 companies that advertise a telephone number for potential customers to call. We found plenty of product support lines and dealer lines but the word sales was

sadly lacking when it came to telephone contact with a call centre.

Amongst those companies that did advertise sales lines, we found teams of well-informed agents, often with a demonstrable belief in the brand and product, who were apparently supported by first class systems enabling them to answer our questions in an efficient and polite manner.

What we also found, however, were complex, maze-like automated menus, which often delivered us to people and even contact centres unable to help us with our enquiry, long wait times and — once we were transferred to the right person — an apparent unwillingness to engage with us in a conversation about our needs, or to engage with us on a personal level. What we found, in essence, was an industry which seemed not to be expecting our call, both in the way

in which the call was routed and in the way the agent was trained to handle it.

Technology and IT are high value, high volume industries. So why the apparent inability to handle a sales enquiry?

Part of the reason may lie in the way in which the industry sells itself to its customers. Few of the companies we researched advertised inbound consumer sales lines because few of them choose to deal directly with consumers. The industry is geared up to selling through dealer distribution channels and the only direct channel available is often the Internet.

IT and technology companies use their sales budget to operate a strategy, in which the sales force pushes the product through the distribution chain, through intermediate customers such as retailers and dealerships. The strategy employed to pull the product

through the chain, by creating consumer demand, focuses largely around advertising and brand marketing. What this means for the consumer is that, just as IT programmers often have no contact with the end users of their software, IT and technology companies are unused to talking to the ultimate customer — the consumer.

The contact centre is often ignored when planning the marketing strategy. Many marketers see call handling as a necessary response handling process, tacked onto the end of a direct marketing campaign. However, the value of a conversation with a well-trained and well-informed agent should not be underestimated. Word of mouth may well be the oldest method of creating consumer demand around, but when used properly it's also one of the most effective. It's time that companies started to take notice.

Under 25% Poor customer experience.

Urgent investigation and action required.

25-50% Functional level of customer service.

Improvement recommended.

50-75% Good level of customer experience.

Certain elements may need enhancement.

Over 75% Excellent customer experience.

Any questions or comments regarding the customer experience spotlight may be addressed to the spotlight team at maia on +44 870 7744220 or by email to: spotlight@maigroup.co.uk



Welcome: sector score 56%

A lower than average score for the opening section of the call. Where this sector really fell down was in getting us connected to an agent who could help with our enquiry. We often found ourselves put through a complicated maze of menus. There also seemed to be a resource issue – the industry achieved a low 45% score for speed of answer.

Find out: sector score 38 %

The industry got low scores across the board, with scores of around 40% for questioning, confirming, and picking up on customer needs. The weakest area was rapport building. The agents had trouble relating to us on a personal level, even when prompted by mystery shoppers. Agents scored only 11% for using follow up questions to build rapport.

Show how: sector score 51%

The show how score was affected by a low find out score. Whilst the agents were knowledgeable (61%) and were capable of answering our questions (59%), they rarely communicated the benefits of the product (29%) and didn't explore other product needs (29%), perhaps because they had failed to explore them in the find out section.

Close: sector score 61%

The industry scored 82% for agreeing a course of action with the client, often directing us to a shop or website to purchase the product we had asked about.

On the negative side, the sector scored 41% for offering further assistance. At times, our shoppers felt that they were being hurried off the phone towards the website or the shop.

Rank	Company	Overall Score	Welcome	Find Out	Show How	Close
1	Sage	76.33	77.19	65.74	83.33	90.48
2	Dell	56.67	57.89	48.15	59.65	80.95
3	Samsung	52.67	45.61	49.07	59.65	52.38
4	LG	51.67	61.40	50.00	47.37	57.14
5	Hewlett Packard	51.33	52.63	47.22	53.51	57.14
6	Toshiba	49.67	66.67	46.30	45.61	42.86
7	Sony	47.00	42.11	35.19	57.02	66.67
8	Kyocera	39.33	63.16	17.59	48.25	38.10
9	Motorola	39.00	54.39	25.93	40.35	57.14
10	Logitech	38.67	56.14	24.07	38.60	66.67
11	Acer	37.00	42.11	27.78	36.84	71.43
12	Apple	30.00	40.35	15.74	33.33	57.14

Please note that the above figures represent the view of our customer experience assessors and are based on a sample of calls assessed using a consistent point system. All comments and scores represent the opinions of the maia spotlight team.

Overall League Table			
Rank	Company	Score	Sector
1	Sage	76.3	IT and technology
2	Thomas Cook	75.7	Leisure and tourism
3	nPower	72.7	Telecoms and utilities
4	First Direct	70.7	Financial services
5	esure	70.7	Financial services
6	British Gas	70.7	Telecoms and utilities
7	Thompson	69.5	Leisure and tourism
8	Butlins	69.0	Leisure and tourism
9	Learn Direct	68.9	Public sector
10	HSBC	67.7	Financial services
11	Orange	67.3	Telecoms and utilities
12	National Blood Service	67.0	Public sector
13	The Royal Air Force	66.8	Public sector
14	Red Letter Days	66.4	Leisure and tourism
15	Carphone Warehouse (Talk Talk)	66.3	Telecoms and utilities
16	The Royal Navy	65.2	Public sector
17	TDA Teaching Helpline	65.1	Public sector
18	Avis	64.7	Leisure and tourism
19	Foreign and Commonwealth Office	64.4	Public sector
20	NHS Stop Smoking Hotline	63.3	Public sector