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Leisure and tourism: who comes out on top?

maia consulting presents CCF's new benchmarking feature, highlighting customer service quality across the UK sector by sector

This month, with temperatures soaring all over the UK, it seems appropriate to turn the spotlight on the leisure and tourism industry. We called the sales and enquiry lines of some major tour operators, airlines, transport providers, holiday parks and leisure activity providers to evaluate the way in which they sell themselves, their brands and, of course, their products and services. As ever, there were some great experiences, and some not-so-great...

In some industries, the customer journey and experience is so closely linked to events in our customers' lives and the emotions they attach to them that we need to go beyond being simply accessible and efficient.

The travel and leisure industry is a sector where contact with the organisation can be seen very much as part of the whole experience. When we make a decision on where to go on holiday or where to take the kids for a day out, we usually

Welcome – Industry score 58%

A SEASONAL influx of calls and its impact on staff resource planning are familiar headaches for any call centre manager. We found the travel and leisure industry to be rising to the challenge, with time to answer comparing very favourably with other industries.

Welcomes were almost always well structured with most agents giving the company name and offering to help. But a surprisingly high number of agents failed to give their own name, with some lacking warmth in the greeting.

Find out – Industry score 50%

THIS WAS the weakest area of the call for most companies in the spotlight this month. Whilst taking into account the busy time of year, we still found very few agents using open questioning techniques to engage the customer in a conversation and even fewer who built any real rapport with the customer over and above being friendly.

The industry was far stronger in asking well directed closed questions to narrow down customer needs, and listened well to the responses the customers gave.

Show how – Industry score 57%

WE WERE pleased with the high levels of enthusiasm displayed by the agents. Travel agents in particular were often advocates of the holidays and activities they were promoting and many of them used personal experience to reinforce their well-developed product knowledge.

However, this enthusiasm and knowledge took a lot of prompting to come to the fore. It was often assumed that the customer already knew what he or she wanted and did not need to be 'sold' to, which is reflected in the low scores the industry achieved for up-selling and cross-selling.

Close – Industry score 56%

THE KEY points in any customer interaction are at the beginning and the end of the call, and it's therefore essential that strong impressions are forged at these points. The industry scored poorly for ending the call positively.

We were also disappointed with the low scores achieved for offering further assistance. A simple "is there anything else I can help you with" ensures that control of the call ends up where it belongs — with the customer.

Closing statement of the month: "Have a magical day!" Alton Towers.

Customer experience

Position	Organisation	Overall experience (%)	Welcome (%)	Find out (%)	Show how (%)	Close (%)
1	Thomas Cook	75.6	73.7	74.4	78.0	73.9
2	Thompson	69.5	45.6	74.9	74.5	78.7
3	Butlins	69.0	79.8	62.4	69.3	71.5
4	Red Letter Days	66.4	68.5	72.1	60.1	64.4
5	Avis	64.6	84.2	55.0	60.5	83.4
6	Hertz	62.3	68.4	55.0	64.0	73.9
7	Centre Parcs	58.0	61.4	52.7	65.3	35.8
8	Trailfinders	57.0	57.9	57.8	57.0	50.1
9	Virgin Airlines	56.0	52.6	51.3	58.7	73.9
10	First Choice	55.3	64.9	39.1	61.4	43.0
11	Legoland	53.6	66.6	43.0	58.7	45.3
12	Opodo	52.0	49.1	50.4	53.5	59.6
13	Enterprise	51.0	59.6	45.7	51.7	50.1
14	GNER	48.5	40.3	41.6	56.1	64.4
15	Alton Towers	47.0	50.8	37.4	53.5	50.1
16	American Airlines	46.0	61.4	41.1	43.0	45.3
17	Eurostar	45.3	52.6	35.5	49.1	54.9
18	Virgin Trains	45.0	35.1	49.4	44.7	50.1
19	Travelbag	39.9	51.0	31.0	47.3	23.7
20	British Airways	38.1	38.6	33.2	44.3	28.7

Overall league table

Position	Organisation	Sector	Overall score
1	Thomas Cook	Leisure and tourism	75.6
2	First Direct	Financial services	70.7
3	esure	Financial services	70.7
4	Thompson	Leisure and tourism	69.5
5	Butlins	Leisure and tourism	69.0
6	HSBC	Financial services	67.7
7	Red Letter Days	Leisure and tourism	66.4
8	Avis	Leisure and tourism	64.6
9	Hertz	Leisure and tourism	62.3
10	More than	Financial services	61.0
11	Directline	Financial services	61.0
12	Admiral Insurance	Financial services	60.0
13	Centre Parcs	Leisure and tourism	58.0
14	Nat West	Financial services	57.3
15	Trailfinders	Leisure and tourism	57.0
16	Zurich	Financial services	56.7
17	Churchill	Financial services	56.0
18	Virgin Airlines	Leisure and tourism	56.0
19	Nationwide	Financial services	55.7
20	First Choice	Leisure and tourism	55.3

make it with a sense of excitement that we just don't have when we choose a paperclip supplier at work. That sense of excitement is often there even when we choose how to get where we are going — by train, plane or car, and as customers we are often desperate to share it. Travel and leisure agents probably have more opportunity to build rapport with their customers and find out about them as people than agents in any other industry.

Why then did the industry manage only 28 per cent for rapport building — only five per cent more than the more 'business-like' financial services sector? Part of the reason may lie in the way in which the industry has been affected over the last decade by the development of the Internet as a key customer touch-point. With Internet access now so wide-

spread, customers have been empowered with the same information previously held only by the organisation. The customer experience has almost become a 'self-serve' environment in which the agent sees his or herself as the last step in the transaction.

Many of the automated menus we heard actually encouraged us to hang up and go to the web. What this means for the customer is that agents are no longer using open questions to open up conversations and build rapport.

The challenge for the travel and leisure agent is to work effectively with the Internet, not for it. The web can provide customers with all the facts, but it will never be able to guide the customer or build a relationship in the way that a well-trained, enthusiastic agent can. ■

Under 25% = Poor customer experience. Urgent investigation and appropriate action required.

25-50% = Functional level of customer experience offered. Improvement recommended.

50-75% = Good level of customer experience is being attained. Although certain elements may need review and enhancement.

Over 75% = Excellent levels of customer experience being offered. Focus on continuous business improvement.

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.

maia consulting

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