



Matching Customer Service Agents to Your Customers' Needs

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Imagine you are an executive for J. Crew. Your entire brand is based upon a community of people who know and love your clothing and accessories. What if you could have an unlimited geographic recruiting area and employ only J. Crew shoppers and J. Crew credit-card holders as your customer service representatives? Further, what if you could direct calls about specific colors or styles to people who actually own those same lines?

If you think your key customer service metrics would increase by matching inquiries from your customers to people who combine passion for your products and the knowledge to provide the highest-quality service, you're probably right. You would probably begin to see your customer service indexes, sales metrics, and customer retention numbers begin to rise.

This is not a customer service dream; it is a reality that companies across the country are taking advantage of today. Agent profiling, the process of matching customer service agents directly with the needs and personalities of customers, is a win-win situation for businesses, customers, and employees alike.

Customers want more

Agent profiling provides the highest and most efficient level of service possible while linking customer service agents' passions to their job. The backlash from customers who have received mediocre service from facilities shows that consumers expect more than simply having their calls answered quickly.

Recruiting customer service and sales agents who are passionate about your products and services and who have strong customer service skills is the first step in providing a superior experience to your customers.

Home-based contact center providers are uniquely poised to successfully match an agent with a caller because recruiters are not bound by geographical requirements. Home-based contact center providers can tap into a virtually unlimited pool of applicants, selecting only those that are a perfect match for the needs of the client.

Agents as trusted advisors

J. Crew is one company taking advantage of agent profiling through the use of home-based contact center agents. Since the people best qualified to relate to J. Crew customers are other J. Crew customers, J. Crew's home-based contact center provider hires only shopping enthusiasts with intimate knowledge of the brand and product lines to work on its program. Such strict hiring profiles allow these home-based employees to communicate about fabrics, colors, and how to match outfits while on the phone with J. Crew customers.

Lynn Bradley is an ideal J. Crew contact center agent because of her experience as a retail manager. Bradley quickly becomes a trusted advisor for customers who reach her when they call with a customer service request. In fact, on a recent call, Bradley was asked to select an entire suitcaseful of clothing for a man who was going on an island vacation and didn't know what to wear. After discussing the finer details of his destination, his skin tone, and even his sensitivity to sunlight, Bradley was able to use her knowledge of the J. Crew product line to select a wardrobe for this customer. Such service is not consistently available without employees who are mature, passionate, and experienced in the work they are performing.

Another company that is reaping the benefits of agent profiling by using the home-based employee model is 1-800-Flowers.com. With a diverse base of callers looking to order flowers and gifts for everything from birthdays and anniversaries to funerals and Mother's Day, 1-800-Flowers needs agents who understand the cultural norms around giving flowers for different occasions.

By working with home-based agents like Martha Libby, 1-800-Flowers can guarantee that agents not only understand the culture of gift-giving but that they also know the difference between a gerber daisy and a shasta daisy and are qualified to make a recommendation on which would work best for a caller's needs.

Libby was recruited by 1-800-Flowers' contact center provider for her knowledge of flowers—she has won awards for her arrangement—and because she is a mature, life-experienced person who can empathize with the needs of each caller. She can intuitively recognize the caller's situation and then suggest the flowers with the colors, style, and message appropriate for that customer's specific situation.

Your ideal agent

At this level of recruiting you should use more-detailed employee profiles to define what specific skills your agents should possess. These profiles will provide a foundation for you to dig deeper and determine the strengths of each applicant. Be certain to ask about hobbies and previous work experience, and hire those agents that are the most natural fit for your customers' needs.

The connection that can be developed between your customer and your company in such a scenario is worth a great deal in customer retention and customer service quality. It also leads to an increase in average sales revenue and other financial metrics, as well as employee satisfaction and retention. Conversely, studies have shown that customer loyalty drops by up to 76% when a customer is less than satisfied with the customer service response he receives.

Customers who receive great customer service will associate your company with great care and will maintain or increase their loyalty to your company. Loyal customers are more receptive to upselling and cross-selling opportunities; as many as half of customers are open to the possibilities of purchasing additional products and services at the time they contact your company with a customer service inquiry that is properly resolved. Also, consider the impact of referral business; a satisfied customer typically tells one to three people, while an unsatisfied customer talks to as many as 10 people about your company.

Finally, as mentioned throughout, matching a customer service and sales employee's job description with his skill set is also the best situation for the employee. As we all know, work dissatisfaction is driven in large part by employees who are forced to work in roles that are contrary to their abilities and void of passion for them. You can reduce attrition rates by providing enjoyable work to your employees through profiling them and then matching their skills to the correct roles and responsibilities.