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## Let Your Most Loyal Customers Handle Your Customer Care

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Imagine you are an executive for Nordstrom. Your entire brand is based upon a community of people who know and love your fashionable clothing, accessories and products for the home. What if you could have an unlimited geographic recruiting area and employ only Nordstrom shoppers and Nordstrom credit card holders as your customer service representatives? Wouldn't it be nice if you could direct calls about specific colors or styles to people who actually own those same items?

If you think your key customer service metrics would increase by matching inquiries from your customers with people who have a passion for your products and the knowledge to provide the highest quality service, you're probably right. In fact, it's likely that you would also 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 offshore 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 better experience to your customers.

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

## **Agents As Trusted Advisors**

1-800-Flowers is one company taking advantage of agent profiling through the use of home-based call center agents. With a diverse base of callers ordering flowers and gifts for everything from birthdays and anniversaries to funerals and Mother's Day, it's important that 1-800-Flowers agents understand the cultural norms around giving flowers for different occasions.

We recruited Martha Libby as a home-based call center agent for the 1-800-Flowers account because of her knowledge of flowers — she has won awards for her arrangements — and because she is a mature, life-experienced person that 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 that are appropriate for that customer's specific situation.

By working with agents like 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 Gerbera Daisy and a Shasta Daisy and are qualified to make a recommendation on which would work best for a caller's needs.

Another company that is reaping the benefits of agent profiling by using home-based contact center agents is J. Crew. Since the people best qualified to relate to J.Crew customers are other J.Crew customers, we hire only shopping enthusiasts with intimate knowledge of the J.Crew brand and product lines to work on the J. Crew program. Even J.Crew credit card holders are answering the phones.

Such strict hiring profiles mean these home-based employees can communicate about fabrics, colors and how to match outfits while on the phone with J.Crew customers. Lynn Bradley is an ideal J.Crew call center agent because of her experience as a retail manager, and she becomes a trusted advisor for J.Crew customers who reach her when they call with a customer service request.

In fact, on a recent call, Bradley was asked to purchase an entire suitcase full 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 new wardrobe for this customer. Such service is only possible from employees who are mature, passionate and experienced in the work they are performing.

## **Additional Benefits**

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 up-selling 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 ten people about your company.

Finally, matching a customer service and sales employee's job description with their 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. Attrition rates can be dramatically reduced by providing enjoyable work to your employees through profiling them and then matching their skills to the correct roles and responsibilities.

Enhancing your company's ability to profile potential customer service and sales agents for specific skill sets establishes a win-win-win situation for your customers, your employees and your company as a whole. Assess your current operations, talk to potential partners, and determine what improvements can be made to your customer service quality. That way, the imagined scenario can be a reality for your company as well.