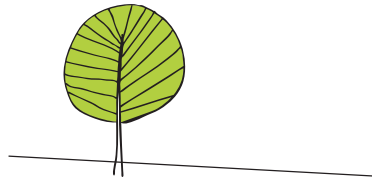

Good customer service means letting customers speak to you



Last year we bought a PC from an online retailer; unfortunately they delivered the wrong product. As we needed to return it and get the right one quickly, we paid a visit to their website to find out how to speak to their customer service team. It would be fair to expect this to be a simple process of going to a 'Contact Us' page and looking for their address and telephone details, perhaps supported by a FAQ or contact form.

Imagine our surprise when we discovered there wasn't one. It's not hidden away in a shady part of their architecture - they simply do not provide a telephone number for anything. This led to a protracted email discussion with a nameless member of their support team who we affectionately nicknamed HAL.

Interestingly, a Google search for the retailer's telephone number reveals many user generated content (UGC) sites with bitter and scathing attacks from disgruntled customers. One even described how to find out the personal telephone number of the CEO. Before we started looking for the number we held this company in high opinion, but their omission led us to read many scathing reviews and bad brand rap.

Although they have obviously made a conscious decision not to provide a number (*probably for cost and easy issue tracking*) they face a potential brand

thrashing because of it. Customers are more likely to switch brands because of other customers opinion, no matter how attached to the brand they were originally. This behaviour was clearly demonstrated in AOL's 'Brand Value' research in late 2004.*

A good 'Contact Us' page should allow users to simply do just that.

It should:

- Help the website owners channel and audit enquiries efficiently
- Display links to related information (*i.e.* FAQs) to help answer a query
- Provide address, telephone and map details that relate to a user's enquiry
- Detail response management policies
- Be straightforward and easy to use
- Comply with appropriate accessibility guidelines and data protection legislation

Getting an edge through customer service no longer means keeping customers satisfied, it means delighting customers; going beyond the basic level to offer an exceptional experience. To engage with customers the minimum online standard is a decent 'Contact Us' page and associated enquiry management. Companies who don't let their customers speak to them, do so at their peril.

*'Brand New World' research report published by AOL and the Henley Centre in 2004

This is what we do...



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