

# Improving Customer Satisfaction Through More Effective ICT Strategies

By A. Gaffney

The recent drive towards self-service and automated customer care has allowed organizations to reduce costs while handling an ever-increasing number of consumer transactions efficiently.

However, the changing profile of end customers, who are becoming increasingly mobile and no longer reliant on a single communications device, means that this reactive customer service model is starting to look increasingly outdated and unresponsive to the modern consumer's needs.

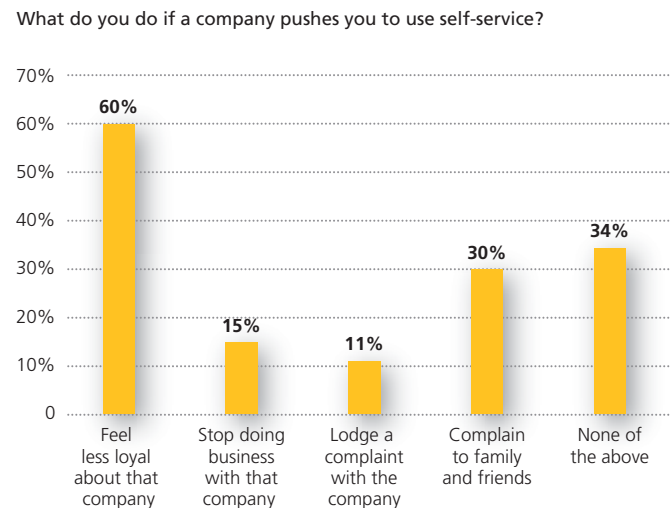
Companies that want to maintain a competitive edge, both now and in the future, are realizing that reactive customer interaction services must be replaced by a more proactive approach that recognizes the growing user-centricity of consumer communications networks.

The paradigm is shifting, and those companies that can move quickly to respond to this change can gain market share, as well as reduce customer churn, by enhancing the experience of customers who now expect anytime, anywhere access to services.

## New Technologies Demand a New Responsiveness

Today's consumers have high expectations. They want instant gratification, whether by downloading the latest music video or completing a transaction online. Business and personal transactions look increasingly alike: the end user wants to connect to your enterprise wherever, whenever, however he wants, and will take his business elsewhere if he's not satisfied with the self-service system that you expect him to use (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Is the drive toward self-service alienating customers?



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As consumers become increasingly mobile, it is imperative to interact with them in the manner of their choosing, at the time of their choosing.

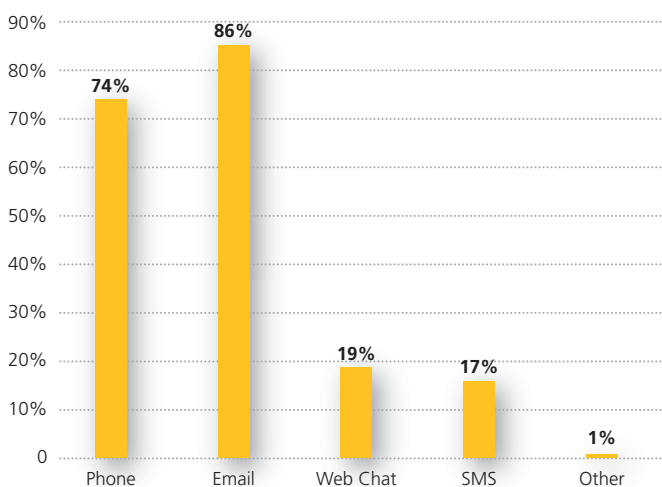
Consumers are increasingly interested in communicating with companies via new and multiple channels: not just voice, but also email, web chat, SMS and so on. A company's ability to respond to customer requests wherever they are, and via whatever device they are using at the time, will have an increasingly significant impact on how effectively an organization connects with their customers (Figure 2).

Companies that rely on being able to contact customers at home need to address this reality of increasingly mobile consumers. B2B organizations expecting to find customers behind their desks must also develop new interaction models to guarantee being able to contact current and potential customers.

Additionally, enterprises cannot afford to miss the opportunity to capture new customers, however they get in touch. Flawless customer service will not only help to retain existing customers, but will also contribute to new business generation; in these technology-savvy times, word about good (and bad) service spreads fast.

Figure 2: Customers are demanding multiple contact channels

By which methods would you like to communicate with a contact center?



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### A Voice at the End of the Phone

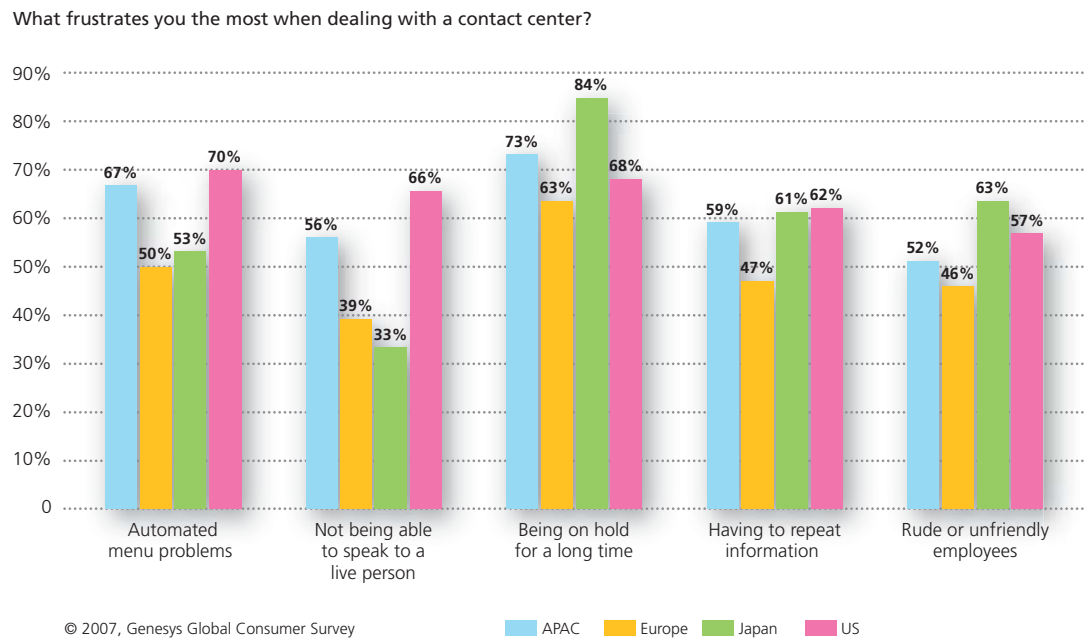
A great deal of effort has been invested in reducing costs by removing people from critical business processes through automation and system integration. The fact remains that nothing is more frustrating for a customer than to have a problem and not be able to talk in real time with someone who can solve it.

There are two elements of this issue. First, customers must have the opportunity to talk to you! They become extremely frustrated if they cannot talk to the right person when they need to, or if they get passed along a chain, repeating the same information to each new contact. Organizations that take advantage of information and communication technology (ICT) and reintegrate the ability to

execute voice sessions at any given time, for example using click-to-talk technology, can connect customers to the right experts as the situation demands.

Second, if customers are to stay loyal, customer contact operatives must be trained and ready to seize the opportunity to satisfy the customer at the earliest opportunity, using their preferred communications method. This means making subject matter experts available when and where needed, which in turn demands sophisticated voice and data integration systems (Figure 3).

Figure 3: The customer contact process needs to be flawless



### Mobile Consumers Expect to Conduct Transactions Anywhere, Anytime

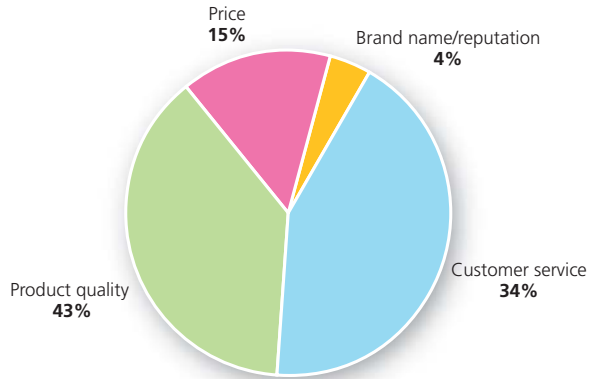
Once customers understand the value proposition of a company (whether service provider or enterprise), they expect automation to work to process their routine transactions. They want to be able to pay bills, transfer money and execute other routine orders from their cell phones, laptops or on the Web.

Again, this requires integration at all levels of the organization's systems, and requires a deep understanding of the business activities and workflows that support the critical interaction point with the customer.

A one-dimensional or silo approach to voice and data networks cannot deliver on the high expectations of consumers and business customers. Not delivering on the promise of integrated communications reduces efficiency in the short term, and can lead to competitive disaster in the long term. Customers prize customer service and expect product quality above all else (Figure 4).

Figure 4: The customer contact experience affects customer loyalty

What has the biggest influence on your loyalty to a company?



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### Integration is the Key

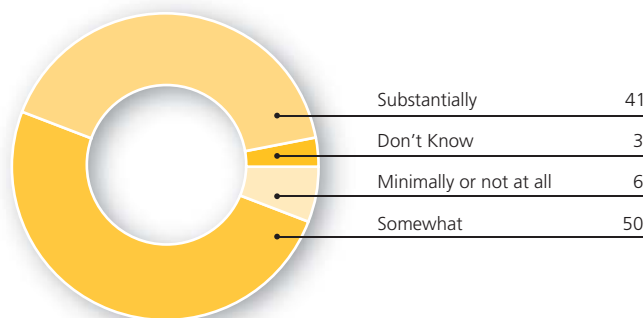
The ICT strategy that an enterprise pursues to retain existing customers and to support new business generation must meet these customer expectations. A successful ICT strategy must provide customers with the type and level of service response they expect, or they will take their business elsewhere.

One obvious example of this is the integration of an increasingly mobile workforce into the customer interaction process. Employees who have anytime, anywhere access to customer and sales-related information are better equipped to satisfy customers quickly and efficiently.

The ability to keep key employees in the field close to customers, while remaining in control of operational tasks, can be a key element in business transformation. The extent to which line managers can realize real productivity from investments in mobile ICT systems can be quite impressive (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Management perception of mobility impact on productivity

In your estimation, how has the use of mobile technology affected the productivity of the employees under your management? (% respondents)



Source: © 2007, The Economist Intelligence Unit, Business in motion: Managing the mobile workforce

“Innovation – in markets, products, services and operating models – is back on the agenda... IT leaders should watch for signals of breakout innovative change within their organization and their industries and consider how technology can be most supportive to the pace of that growth endeavor.”

© 2006, Gartner Symposium, “CEO Concerns and How They Must Drive IT Agendas,”  
Mark Raskino, November 5-9, 2006.

The opportunities to derive value from ICT are further enhanced when mobility investments are linked to emerging collaboration technology. This provides an opportunity to leverage day-to-day usage of enterprise data and applications within an integrated ICT network that responds to customer requirements.

Hence, it is increasingly essential for enterprises to ensure that employees can use communications tools and services that allow them to be highly productive anywhere, any time, using any device.

In other words, the ICT network is fast becoming a key component of the overall business strategy. In this environment, the CIO lies in the critical path of executing the new business opportunities conceived by the CEO and the rest of the organization.

Alcatel-Lucent's Managed Communications Services portfolio includes all the tools that enterprises need to attract and retain customers through a flawless customer contact process. **Managed Business Communications** ensure that the mobile workforce is kept in the loop anywhere, anytime. **Managed Customer Interaction** solutions help businesses to improve customer service, increase customer satisfaction and retention, reduce infrastructure and manpower costs, and develop new revenue opportunities.

## Conclusion

Today's enterprises must approach their communications networks as more than just a collection of PBXs, switches, routers, servers and telecom services. Increasingly, enterprises must see their networks as strategic platforms that can help transform their businesses and allow them to operate more effectively on the world stage.

To be successful today and in the future, enterprise executives – specifically CIOs – should develop well thought-out ICT strategies that take into consideration not only technology, but also the needs, experiences and expectations of customers.

Properly developed, a communications infrastructure can help give the enterprise a competitive advantage; the ability to satisfy current and potential customers quickly and effectively is rapidly becoming a key differentiator for enterprises that wish to succeed over the long term. ►►

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# Customer Focus: The Bottom Line Impact

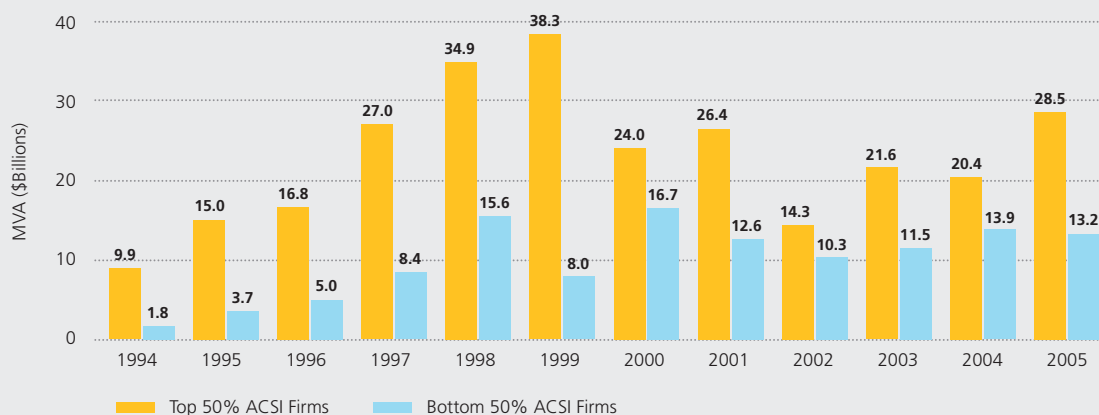
By B. Thronson

Companies with high levels of customer satisfaction have a *significantly higher intrinsic value* as compared to their peers with less satisfied customers.

This point is quantifiably demonstrated by the American Customers Satisfaction Index (ACSI), which measures customer satisfaction based on thousands of interviews with customers of over 200 enterprises in 35 industries. When ACSI data is plotted against Market Value Added (MVA equals market value minus invested capital) (see Figure 1), the result is what all CEOs know intuitively: customer satisfaction is a key success factor.

How can companies focus on achieving customer satisfaction? The best starting point is usually the contact center, which is often the first (and sometimes the only) human interaction a customer has with a company. Many customers form their perceptions of a company based on their experiences with that company's contact center. Genesys Telecommunications, an Alcatel-Lucent company focused on customer interactions, commissioned a survey of more than 4,200 consumers worldwide to better understand how they want to be treated by a company's contact center.

Figure 1: Average Market Value Added: High and Low ACSI Firms\*



\* Source: MVA from Stern Stewart & Co.; Annually Updated ACSI Firms

While most contact centers have been managed as resources that respond to customers' requests for service, a significant opportunity exists for contact centers to be more proactive in building engaging relationships with their customers.

The survey showed that 89% of consumers want to receive proactive communications from their suppliers. And 84% want to hear about a company's additional products and services, giving companies the opportunity to up-sell and cross-sell to consumers while engaging them.

Consumers continue to be frustrated by basic problems:

- 67% are frustrated by long hold times.
- 57% are frustrated by IVRs with too many or incorrect options.
- 52% are frustrated by having to repeat information they've already provided.

Companies can differentiate themselves by doing the basic blocking and tackling to avoid these common problems and by providing integrated multimedia contact options increasingly preferred by consumers: email, web chat and SMS. For example, 86% of consumers would like to communicate with a company via email, and 45% say that email is, in fact, their preferred method of communication.

If you would like to receive the complete survey results or learn more about how a consumer focus can help your organization's bottom line, please contact Bob Thronson, VP Managed Service Solutions at Genesys Telecommunications Laboratories, Daly City, California, USA. Email: [thronson@genesyslab.com](mailto:thronson@genesyslab.com)