

MAKE YOUR RESOLUTION STICK

WHY YOUR TOP IMPROVEMENT GOAL FOR 2016 SHOULD BE **COMPLAINTS HANDLING**

WHITEPAPER

Was January your only month for seeking out improvement for the year ahead? Resolutions don't just have to be for the start of the year or indeed they don't just have to pertain to our personal lives. Any improvement, whether it's a New Year's resolution or a longer term aim, a personal goal or a professional one, must simply be achievable and also something you really want to do.

To make sure your resolution doesn't top the list of those most commonly broken, whenever you make it, choose something to improve that will spur you on for fear of being left behind. Something such as a topic or subject that **89% of companies** are planning to compete on alone in 2016 according to Gartner: customer experience.

Working on making things better for your customers is definitely an achievable goal and will not only mean customer satisfaction, greater retention rates and improved loyalty; you will also get to tick off a kept resolution – a really rare phenomenon and one that would mean just as much to your customers as it does to you.

Customer experience covers most, if not all, of your organisation and if you try to tackle it all in one go it might end up as just another crossed out, broken resolution by the end of the year.

There are many places you might want to start your customer experience improvement journey. Why not then start with an area where your customers do all the hard work and research for you – also the one place you might end up losing your customers for good (or winning them back forever) – and improve your complaints handling?

WHY SHOULD COMPLAINTS BE THE FIRST ON YOUR LIST?

Complaints can make or break a relationship between you and the customer. While experiences elsewhere in your business, with your products and services or with your helpdesk for example, will help form a customer's impression of you; a single poor experience with their complaint, and a customer can leave, vowing never to come back.

It's also the perfect place to start winning back the hearts and minds of the silent majority of customers who do not complain when they have had a bad experience. Esteban Kolsky, CEO of ThinkJar and former Gartner analyst, conducted a [customer experience survey](#) and shared 50 of his findings, one of which states "Only 1 out of 26 unhappy customers complain. The rest churn. A lesson here is that companies should not view absence of feedback as a sign of satisfaction. The true enemy is indifference." Making sure you are accessible and welcoming to all types of feedback will ensure customer loyalty and also improve other parts of your business in the process through insight you may not otherwise be capturing.

Some of the top customer experience trends for 2016 relate directly to complaints handling, so let's see which ones should be tackled, and just how to make them stick through the year and beyond.

AN OMNI-CHANNEL PRESENCE

Your customers can get in touch with you in more ways than ever before, and they expect a great experience however they choose to reach out to you. Traditional methods of communication are still popular, and contact through social media channels is growing rapidly. You may be able to respond extremely well to complaints made via email, but would the same customer get the same experience if they made their complaint on Twitter?

Having a complaints team who are able to handle all of these methods of communication seamlessly can be a challenge. In fact, the research conducted by Esteban Kolsky shows that

"55% of customer requests for service on social media are not acknowledged." If a customer has to try two or three different channels before even getting to speak to someone, it will only help to confirm a negative impression and perhaps make up the customer's mind before they have even explained their original concerns.

Improving your omni-channel presence will help complaints handlers pick up a conversation via email with someone who has complained over the phone, for example, making for a much better experience for the customer who will appreciate not having to repeat their situation on both channels.

Improving your omni-channel presence: how to make it stick:

- Make sure you are monitoring any channel on which you can receive communication – complaints can come from any of these channels at any time – even as a reply to an automated email or newsletter. You should also monitor those channels your company isn't an active part of for comments.
- Be prepared to take the complaint to another channel. To use the above example, a customer angry enough to reply to marketing information with an incensed message certainly deserves a phone call as soon as possible in this case to resolve the situation. Replying on the same channel may not show a sense of urgency or the necessary care in making this customer's experience better.
- Have a single location or system where all complaints information is stored. That way, different handlers can speak to one complainant via two or three separate channels and pick up exactly where the last colleague left off.

SELF-SERVICE

It seems that fewer of us want to spend our time working with other people to find a solution to our problems. As self-service machines multiply in shops, public transport and wherever there used to be a person, your customers expect to be able to find exactly what they want without having to have a discussion about it. In fact, by 2020, Gartner predicts that **85%** of an enterprise's relationship with a customer will be managed without interacting with a human. Whether it's finding a 'how-to' guide or making a complaint, customers are going to want to be able to do it themselves.

Having a quick and easy to use self-service facility may also encourage feedback from those who dislike other methods and also presents a new opportunity to capture complaints from the 90% who wouldn't otherwise voice their concerns.

Improving your self-service facility: how to make it stick:

- Make it easy for customers to get in touch with you in the first place. Having easy to find phone numbers or email addresses, or even a simple form, makes step one of the complaint process much easier, and cuts the frustration of the customer having to call one number to find that they then need to dial another. An FAQ run down of exactly how to make a complaint will also enable customers to solve their very first potential stumbling block themselves.
- In the long run, devoting an area of your website to a self-service function where a customer can enter and track a complaint will do wonders for their experience. They can submit a complaint whenever they like, even if it is outside your normal office hours. That way, customers feel that they are in control and can see exactly how their complaint is progressing without having to wait impatiently for a reply.

BIG DATA

To understand exactly what needs to improve, you need to know how customers feel about all aspects of your business. Complaints are a great way to capture data on parts of the business that aren't working so well, or to find trends and common issues, and they also offer a chance to put things right. With more and more customer information to analyse, it can be difficult to capture exactly what kind of data you want (or need) and even more difficult to trawl through it, pull out those golden nuggets and start acting on them.

The best solution would be to capture as much information as possible, and invest in technology to manage and analyse your data, bringing you the insights you need to drive improvement.

Improving your data: how to make it stick:

- If you don't already do so, start collecting as much complaints data as you possibly can and make sure you learn from it. There might be an issue with a particular product or service, but there could also be an issue with complaints handling workflow or processes which are resulting in a poor customer experience.
- Present data in easy to view ways. A spreadsheet full of numbers isn't going to hold attention, but a colour coded dashboard with charts will make data easier to digest, especially for those at executive level or board level who need information quickly to put change into motion.
- Seek out root causes and monitor trends. Being able to drill down and pinpoint the exact cause of a flurry of complaints could prevent the problem happening again in the future, or even prevent an escalation of a current problem.

WILL IT LAST UNTIL THE END OF THE YEAR?

Starting small but in a meaningful way with your customer experience improvement will certainly make it simpler to keep on track with changes, as well as being easier to see just how much of an impact your actions are having.

One company already well on their way to excellent customer service is RSA, one of the leading worldwide insurance companies, who have seen the value of improving their complaints management. In a recent [case study](#) they stated that it was their ambition to become “the market leading insurer when it comes to complaint management.” RSA stuck to their resolution and now have quicker reaction times to complaints thanks to their improvements, which in turn has resulted in improved customer satisfaction.

Back in 2014, Gartner predicted that “Fewer than half of companies surveyed rate their customer experience as exceptional today, but two-thirds expect it to be so in two years.” Would you rate your customer experience as exceptional now compared to two years ago? Additionally, in two years’ time, do you want to be the same as now, or better? If so, there is always room for one more resolution.

For those who are considering investing capital in complaints management, an effective way of doing so is with Apteans Respond. This solution is used by many companies in industries such as financial services, travel and local government who have already invested wisely and seen quantifiable improvements in customer experience as a result.

To learn more about Apteans and how we support organisations with their complaints management, visit www.aptean.com.



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