

Customers win as companies now listen better

Issued by [Synovate](#)

18 Feb 2005

Good news for consumers is that organisations now have an increased focus on tracking customer satisfaction and to listening what they have to say. This is according to the latest Merchants Global Contact Centre Benchmarking Report, which is produced by Dimension Data and global research company Synovate, which is also the South Africa's biggest market research company.

It is the seventh such report published, and provides important benchmarks for businesses to measure their contact centre or call centre operations against. The report has global and industry input from 166 contact centres across 24 countries and five continents.

"Companies call centres now increasingly track customer satisfaction and the solving of problems the first time a customer calls, which shows an increased awareness of and focus on the customer's experience of the company. Customer satisfaction is no longer an add-on from the marketing department but is now a core measure often used to gauge both individual agent and collective team or contact centre performance," said Albert McLean, managing director of Synovate South Africa.

"According to the report, the measurement of customer satisfaction is likely to mature over the next couple of years, allowing measurement by communication type whether it is via phone, e-mail or Internet, which is critical to effect a company's customer satisfaction going forward."

As customers demand better and quicker service, and at the same time, the number of consumers continues to grow around the world, the contact centre industry will continue to grow.

"Organisations more fully understand the potential positive and negative impact of contact centre interaction. Objectives and measurement have matured and organisations want to resolve customer queries quickly and effectively. The obvious benefit of this is the delivery of excellent customer service," said McLean.

While the frenzy around customer relationship management (CRM) has largely abated, the need to have and to use accurate and complete customer data is critical to successful customer interaction. CRM programmes are continuing under different names with the 'nice to have' stripped out whilst retaining the core ability to gather, display and use customer data.

"As users of the service provided by company's contact centres, customers are also ideally positioned to provide valuable feedback and ideas for improving the service. However, it's interesting to note that less than 50% of centres provide their customers with this opportunity."

"The one thing that will never change is that in order to provide excellent customer service, companies need to listen carefully to customers and resolve their queries as quickly and easily as possibly," said McLean.

However, it's quite common that customers feel that companies do not actually listen to what that they have to say. A new trend is to let customers respond to recorded voice-prompted questionnaire during their call to a company's call centre, by simply pushing keys on their telephone pad. Because the system is automated it is ideal to monitor business operations on a continuous basis.

"It is about getting feedback directly from customers immediately after their experience with a call centre, with a restaurant or with a retail establishment," said McLean. "Using advanced Internet technology, systems make the customer feedback viewable with seconds via a standard, secure web-browser. It is also possible for even the CEO of a company, to listen to

recorded customer comments, what was said and how it was said - the actual 'Voice of the Customer' - and not a toned down version as related by a call centre agent."

Further findings of the report show that 76% of contact centres measure the satisfaction of their customers with the service provided by the centre. "If managers want to improve their understanding of customers and their views and experiences of the service provided by their contact centre, a highly effective method is to have the same experience as the customer, through for instance, mystery shopping," said McLean.

"During the year to come, the increased importance of customer communication and knowledge will lead to a more strategic role for successful contact centres," said McLean. "In addition, more investments will be made in people as organisations learn the harsh lessons of under-investment. "

Synovate is a world leader in market research across a variety of industries and focus areas, including contact centres and telecommunications. ViewsCast is Synovate's contact centre research tool, used by many of the world's leading brands to monitor customer satisfaction and call quality.

More information on the Merchants Global Contact Centre Benchmarking Report is available at www.ccbenchmarking.com

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