

Five Ways to Improve Customer Responsiveness

Successful small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs) know that landing a customer is just the beginning.

Keeping that customer happy by responding to his or her needs is the key to long-term success, and the network is a vital tool for customer responsiveness.

"A business that's networked is more responsive and more intelligent, and can provide customers with a higher quality of service," says Kneko Burney, president and chief strategist with Compass Intelligence, a consulting and market analytics company. The network helps SMBs stay responsive in many ways; here are just five.

1. Giving Customers Self-Service Options

To keep customers happy, SMBs must answer their questions quickly and accurately. A static website FAQ (frequently asked questions) isn't enough anymore; customers want to make appointments, check product availability, and determine order status day or night. Network-powered.

"Web services" make this possible, and with today's wide variety of Web applications and solutions, businesses can create dynamic Websites that respond to customers' real needs. "There are so many applications and great standards-based solutions today," Burney says. "By working with a Web developer, [an SMB] can have a sophisticated Website without investing a lot of money, and securely open up their network to customers."

2. Keeping Customer Data Secure, Yet Accessible

Complete, accurate customer information is important to customer responsiveness. When customer data is available on the network, easily accessible by service representatives, responsiveness soars: "It's a whole new level of immediacy," Burney explains. "An agent answering the phone can access customer information over the network in a secure fashion and respond to customer needs right away, rather than saying, 'I'll call you back.'" Of course, security is paramount when customer data is on the network. In 2005 JupiterResearch reported that 43 percent of consumers place online security among the top three factors in selecting where to bank. Reliable, integrated network security is essential to be both responsive to customers and responsible with their precious data.

3. Helping Customers Find You

Customers who want to shop locally start their search online more than ever before. The use of Internet search engines to find local business information in the United States increased from 47 percent in 2003 to 55 percent in 2005 — a 17 percent increase — according to research firm The Kelsey Group. Search engine sites Google, Yahoo, MSN, and AOL have all launched local search services, and tapping into their power starts with free, simple steps such as adding a city name and ZIP code to every page on a company website. Coupled with customer self-service, providing local search keeps SMBs at the top of customers' shopping lists.

4. Helping Customers Contact the Right Person

Internet searching and shopping have their place, but many customers still want to pick up the phone, and nothing kills customer responsiveness like an unanswered call. "Not only is answering the call important, but customers now expect to be connected to someone who has knowledge of their history and can respond intelligently to their specific needs," says Derek Hibbard, senior manager of the Commercial Midmarket Campaign team at Cisco Systems.

That's why many SMBs embrace IP Communications, technology that converges telephone and data networks and offers "presence management" and other features that can help improve customer responsiveness. Presence management means your staff can automatically forward their calls to another number, like a mobile phone, or to another person. "It simplifies the experience for the customer, so they don't have to call four different numbers to reach you," Burney says. With the right software, your network can also keep track of a pool of agents who live or work in different geographic areas, knowing when they are available to assist customers and from what number. This makes it easy for customer calls to be routed to a live agent so they have a positive experience with your support services.

5. Measuring Customer Loyalty Efforts

The old adage says you can't manage what you can't measure, and the network is a useful tool for measuring customer responsiveness. Walker Information, a research firm, knows this firsthand: some 300 companies use its Internet-based SmartLoyalty System to track customer loyalty. "Listening to the voice of the customer is a necessity for all successful companies," says Michael DeSanto, Walker's vice president.

The network helps Walker, a company with 250 employees, respond to its customer needs. "We knew how critically important fast response time would be to customers accessing the SmartLoyalty System," says Brian Kovacs, Walker's CIO. Even brief network outages hurt customer responsiveness and confidence. "We needed a network infrastructure that could reliably and securely support customer traffic," Kovacs says, so Walker installed a 100 percent Cisco network. It helps Walker stay responsive to its clients, and network-powered services help Walker's clients respond in turn to their customers. Any business can emulate Walker's success by identifying customer-facing business processes that network technology supports and building a reliable infrastructure for it.

Living Large, Staying Nimble

Large companies have been working for years to become more customer-focused; now, network-powered customer responsiveness is available and affordable for SMBs. "That's the thing about the network," Burney says. "When you really leverage network technology, a smaller business can look and feel and behave like a big one, but with speed and nimbleness of a small business."

Network technology to support customer responsiveness is available through Cisco's value-added resellers and managed services providers, who work with SMBs to design and implement solutions that meet their specific customer-centered needs. In addition, a Cisco Smart Business Roadmap can help companies prioritize key business challenges such as customer responsiveness, and help align the right technology to address these challenges today and in the future.

These solutions are available to SMBs through Cisco Systems Capital at competitive rates in innovative, flexible leasing and financing programs.

**Corporate Headquarters**

Cisco Systems, Inc.
170 West Tasman Drive
San Jose, CA 95134-1706
USA

www.cisco.com

Tel: 408 526-4000

800 553-NETS (6387)

Fax: 408 526-4100

European Headquarters

Cisco Systems International BV
Haarlerbergpark
Haarlerbergweg 13-19
1101 CH Amsterdam
The Netherlands

www-europe.cisco.com

Tel: 31 0 20 357 1000

Fax: 31 0 20 357 1100

Americas Headquarters

Cisco Systems, Inc.
170 West Tasman Drive
San Jose, CA 95134-1706
USA

www.cisco.com

Tel: 408 526-7660

Fax: 408 527-0883

Asia Pacific Headquarters

Cisco Systems, Inc.
168 Robinson Road
#28-01 Capital Tower
Singapore 068912

www.cisco.com

Tel: +65 6317 7777

Fax: +65 6317 7799

Cisco Systems has more than 200 offices in the following countries and regions. Addresses, phone numbers and fax numbers are listed on the Cisco.com website at www.cisco.com/go/offices

Argentina • Australia • Austria • Belgium • Brazil • Bulgaria • Canada • Chile • China PRC • Colombia • Costa Rica Croatia • Cyprus • Czech Republic
Denmark • Dubai, UAE • Finland • France • Germany • Greece • Hong Kong SAR Hungary • India • Indonesia • Ireland • Israel • Italy • Japan
Korea • Luxembourg • Malaysia • Mexico • The Netherlands • New Zealand • Norway • Peru • Philippines • Poland • Portugal • Puerto Rico • Romania
Russia Saudi Arabia • Scotland • Singapore • Slovakia • Slovenia • South Africa • Spain • Sweden • Switzerland • Taiwan Thailand • Turkey • Ukraine • United
Kingdom • United States • Venezuela • Vietnam • Zimbabwe

Copyright © 2006 Cisco Systems, Inc. All rights reserved. Important notices, privacy statements and trademarks of Cisco Systems, Inc. can found on cisco.com