

WHITEPAPER

Retaining customer orientated service

Lessons learned during the P word



Introduction


With a nation stuck at home during lockdown, internet shopping enjoyed a boom as people increasingly turned to online retailers for food, drink, clothing, luxury items and much more. Ofcom reports that online spend increased by 48% in 2020, against a previous average annual increase of 13%.

Even though the high street has re-opened and people can shop in-person once more, customer expectations have changed and the lessons learned during the P word must be heeded for future business success.

The 'Amazon Effect' has driven a greater than ever focus on customer service. By offering a wide choice of products, high availability and fast delivery times, the online retailer has significantly raised the bar for all businesses offering products and services to consumers. The concept of instant gratification is becoming normalised in other walks of life too. Where once we would have had to wait for our weekly instalment of a favourite TV show, streaming services now offer the entire series in one hit.

Visits to a high street music retailer are a thing of the past when new recordings are immediately available to download on release; and from holidays to takeaways, it seems that no one is prepared to wait for anything anymore.

Field service businesses ignore this change in customer expectation at their peril. People will no longer tolerate suppliers that ask them to sit at home all day in the hope that they may deign to show up. And they will no longer accept slow delivery, lack of transparency in tracking the progress of an order, or inefficient use of appointment time by an ill-equipped operative. In a highly competitive world, organisations who fail to consistently meet these new expectations will be passed by. Customers vote with their wallets and are choosing more efficient and customer-focused businesses.

A close-up photograph of a person's hands typing on a silver laptop keyboard. A white credit card is held in the person's left hand, partially overlapping the keyboard. The background is softly blurred, showing a desk with a white container and a window with blinds. The overall lighting is warm and slightly dim, creating a focused and professional atmosphere.

Ofcom reports that online spend increased by 48% in 2020, against a previous average annual increase of 13%

What makes great customer service?

Whether operatives are measuring and fitting carpets, delivering and installing white goods, making repairs and scheduled maintenance visits for housing residents, or delivering any other service where operatives interact with customers in their homes, the business challenges are the same. Customers expect the following:

- Appointments scheduled within a short time frame, so they are not left waiting for a delivery or repair visit for too long – immediate gratification is the order of the day.
- Short appointment windows that suit their own personal commitments, with flexibility to fit around their working hours, or the school run. Scheduling revolves around the customer, not the supplier.
- Certainty that the operative will arrive on time, or they will quickly drop their supplier for a more reliable one, courtesy of online and peer reviews.

- Real time communication between operative and customer so that each can flag delays or unexpected problems that may affect the appointment. The customer does not want to be kept waiting for an operative who arrives late, or worse, not at all.
- Operatives who are fully informed about the purpose of the visit, and bring the correct materials, tools and expertise to get the job done in a single visit wherever possible.
- Professional, friendly and expert operatives that they can trust to have in their homes and deliver a great service in a pleasant manner – we mustn't forget the human touch.

Customer satisfaction – the ultimate marketing weapon

Customer-orientated service makes sound financial sense for businesses because investing in great customer service drives greater profit and helps keep marketing costs down. Processes that produce greater efficiencies in time and costs, such as easy automated computer systems, can also help to retain a more stable and productive workforce, saving the business time and money in recruitment and training. And both of these positive business outcomes also help drive improved experience for the customer. Satisfied customers are a key part of business growth strategy and improving market share and they should be the ultimate goal for every service organisation. Here's why:

- A satisfied customer is the most profitable solution for sales and marketing – they don't need to be sold to, providing the level of customer satisfaction is maintained. According to customer [retention trends data](#), 65% of sales come from existing customers, 80% of future profits will come from 20% of existing customers and repeat customers spend an average 33% more than first-timers.

- Existing customers are also the best ambassadors for the business, helping to attract new customers for the future. Positive word of mouth and recommendations are much more powerful than any advertising campaign or claims a business might make about itself.
- Good reputations can be hard to win and are very easy to lose. It all comes down to customer experience. Businesses can lose 71% of their customers due to poor service



65% of sales
come from
existing customers

Source: [Retention trends data](#)

Being a preferred supplier

Every customer has their preferred supplier - the companies they will do business with again and again because of a trusted track record, great product and strong service. To become the preferred supplier of future customers, businesses need to focus on the way they build a relationship with their customers and how they take that forward for optimised results. These are key points to consider:

- From the initial touch point and connection with a new customer, businesses need to look at how they build on this to create further transactions. It may mean developing new products and services, on the basis of feedback and other market research, to fulfil a need that the customer did not even realise they had. Apple are a great example of this. It produces market-leading innovations that have been consistently associated with high quality and ease of use. They build customer loyalty and keep progressing that relationship with new products that seem guaranteed to have customers queuing around the block whenever they go on sale.

- Customers want a personalised experience. They need to feel like the products and services they are ordering will be right for them. Previous successful interactions with a business are likely to drive further successful interactions because they already prefer that business and feel it is responding to their needs. So it's crucial that every point of contact is a success from the customer's point of view, allowing the business to keep building on that loyalty.

ESG helps engage with and retain customers

Customers are increasingly driven by values and purpose, so organisations that demonstrate they have a good 'green' ethos, with a focus on environment, social and governance (ESG) will stand out from the crowd. In a choice between two similar offers from different suppliers, customers are becoming more likely to choose the one that is also making a positive difference to the planet and its people. Sound ESG credentials can also help to attract investors, who view a well-designed and implemented ESG strategy as evidence of overall sound financial governance. Even suppliers will be more reassured dealing with a business with a well-articulated and authentic ESG strategy, as it infers that they care about doing the right thing generally, and will implement good business practises such as paying on time. Here are some points to consider:

- Successful businesses are looking at ways to reduce their carbon footprint for the sake of the environment. They follow the principles of re-use, recycle and repair, instead of replace.
- Making reductions in energy use, fuel and transport costs, running a paper-free workplace and reducing and recycling waste is not only good for the planet, these save on key out-goings as well, thus increasing profit margins.

- 'Greener' practices can produce a significant benefit to the local community, for example operatives who are spending less time idling in traffic jams, or going back and forth across the same streets all day, results in cleaner air for local residents.
- Using data for carbon footprint and greenhouse gas (GHG) reporting is essential in order to highlight progress and identify areas where improvements are required. Currently in the UK there is a legal requirement for some areas of ESG to be reported, depending on size/turnover, and forward-thinking organisations are getting ahead of the curve, as the scope of these mandated reports is likely to increase. Advanced is on a journey to measure and improve ESG, for the sake of the planet, for the people that work within the business and for the local communities where it operates and has recently published its first [ESG report](#).

Technology enhances human interactions

People are at the heart of great service. Whether on the other end of a phone, in an online chat, or delivering a service in the customer's home, employees must put the customer first. This is partly down to identifying and recruiting people with the best attitude and aptitude for good customer service, and is also down to training. Recruiters now recognise that a more diverse workforce has been shown to be more productive, as well as being a more accurate reflection of the customers they serve and contributing to positive customer feedback.

Building successful relationships between businesses and customers and delivering great customer service requires implementation of the right technology to support those human connections. Powerful digital solutions can enhance the human touch, streamlining processes to help customer service professionals deliver a more efficient and customer-focused service. Here are some ways it can do this:

- Service technology is software that assists customer service teams in achieving customer success. These tools improve workflow efficiency and make it easier for companies to provide effective solutions to their customers. Adopting service technology helps companies manage the increasing demand for outstanding customer service so that even new recruits who

have not accrued the experience and in-depth knowledge of their colleagues are accessing the identical information via automated workflows to deliver the same high level of service.

- Reduced inconvenience makes for better customer feedback. Organisations that don't use digital software for scheduling, operative management, booking and keeping in touch with customers run the risks of letting them down, sending an ill-equipped operative or requiring a repeat visit that may further aggravate the customer relationship. First-time fixes mean happier customers and more profit.
- Use data, specifically around customer feedback, to guide improvements in processes and activity. Really listening to customers is critical. There is always the temptation to respond in a defensive way, justifying what went wrong and why (and there are always good reasons), but all feedback should be welcomed as an opportunity for change and improvement.
- A great reputation is hard to earn and easy to lose. Every touchpoint with customers must offer great customer service. Digital solutions can help with this, from booking visits with bookers who are armed with automated processes that make sure the most appropriate operative with the right equipment will attend, to quick and convenient digital signatures at the end of the visit.



- The pandemic is still with us, and it may not be the last major disruption. Technology helps with supporting social distancing and makes it easier for us all to stay safe. Field service companies are starting to look at ways to offer effective remote support, with advice and guided support that can make a physical visit unnecessary.
- Technology experts have specialised knowledge in the field service sector and can provide the most appropriate and effective solutions based on a thorough understanding of each specific customer sector and market needs. The best technology suppliers are well established and experienced, they will be there for the long haul, developing new features in response to their own customer requirements and will offer other business solutions that integrate with field service software, such as finance, accounting, customer relations management (CRM) and payroll.

Commercial and retail field service

Identifying and implementing the right digital solutions can be transformative, helping businesses deliver great customer service and build a strong reputation while effectively managing costs and environmental impact. Optimising journey times using digital software can generate a 10% decrease in mileage and fuel costs, crucial at a time when fuel costs are rising and reaching record-breaking highs. Digital solutions can also increase levels of productivity by an average 20%, while making daily working life easier for operatives in the field and at base. Traditionally, booking teams needed in-depth local knowledge in order to manually schedule a day of visits for an operative that optimised travel time. They also had to have a detailed understanding of the skills and processes that would be required at each job, to ensure the best operative was allocated. Automation software ensures that the most suitable people are deployed on visits and that journey times and distances are optimised. They also respond dynamically to changes including customer cancellations and operatives being off-sick and on holiday, meaning that customers are not left in the lurch. Using digital solutions can reduce the time for training new staff, with less cost and for greater results.

The current skills shortage has highlighted the importance of improving the experience for employees too. Using automated processes streamlines the work, making it easier and more enjoyable. A less stressed workforce takes fewer sick days and has higher levels of job satisfaction and well-being, helping businesses to retain good employees. This has a cost benefit as reduced churn means less investment in recruitment and training, and ensuring employees feel supported with effective digital tools to do their jobs can also lead to them wanting to stay and progress their careers within an organisation. This is crucial for building a successful and sustainable business, with a stable workforce, that can focus on daily tasks and delivering great service to customers.

Carpetright – a customer-orientated success story

Three Advanced field service solutions, Dynamic Resource Scheduler (DRS), Job Manager, and InfoSuite have helped European retailer Carpetright increase productivity, have greater visibility of field service staff and improve customer service. Trading in the UK, Belgium and the Netherlands, the business has over 3,000 employees working across 600 stores and 320 store-based home consultants. This had become a scheduling challenge that the existing system could no longer cope with. Steve Johnson, Head of Central Operations at Carpetright says: "Holidays, sickness and vacancies had a big impact on stores, as all of the consultants were managed individually with little or no control over scheduled working patterns." There was also limited visibility of consultant performance and the number of estimates and conversions to demonstrate productivity.

The implementation of DRS meant that customers were no longer waiting for a first appointment slot – they were booked in straightaway with a consultant scheduled for the visit. Job Manager furnishes the consultants with details of their daily workload and the ability to electronically capture job information on-site.

InfoSuite provides Carpetright managers with important data to monitor KPIs including appointments made and kept, no-access information, jobs completed and individual worker performance tracking.

The customer experience has improved greatly as they can now request hour-long slots instead of the previous half-day window for an appointment, making it easier for them to fit into their own schedules and text message reminders mean that fewer appointments are missed by forgetful customers. Geographical profiling allows consultants to be connected to the nearest jobs rather than those allocated to a particular store, reducing the time that customers have to wait to secure an appointment. This not only benefits the customer, but has led to an increase in the number of completed home visits with a reduction in fuel costs and the organisation's carbon footprint.

Carpetright reports that the three Advanced solutions have contributed to an increase in estimated sales of 30%, an increase in home visits by 20,000 year-on-year and reduced travel costs in real terms.

Field service operations in housing

There are around [4 million households](#) in social housing and while the majority of social landlords deal fairly with their tenants, the sector is still lacking sufficient regulation. Sadly, it seems to have taken the loss of 72 lives in the fire at Grenfell Tower to provoke a response to this at national level and drive motivation for change. The UK Government has now set out [The Charter for Social Housing Residents](#), that aims to address problems in the relationship between residents, who feel that they are not listened to or cared about, and housing providers. Although not legally binding, the charter sets out seven expectations for residents that include being safe in their home, to be treated with respect, to have their voice heard and know how their landlord is performing.

These are useful benchmarks that could be adopted by the wider field service sector and any organisation that deals with customers in their homes. A charter for the sector might include, for example, the following targets, all of which are achievable with the implementation of the right digital solutions:

- That operatives or deliveries should arrive at the pre-arranged time
- That work is effectively carried out in order to reduce the inconvenience of return visits
- The existence of real time communication between resident and operative in case of delays
- That there is a quick and easy feedback process
- All feedback must be acknowledged, analysed, collated, and acted upon



Focus on the future

Ultimately, organisations that set the highest bar for themselves and their relationship with their customers will do so by putting in place the best processes and mechanisms that will help them achieve these standards. Their business will benefit from higher levels of customer satisfaction, and the added benefits of word-of-mouth recommendation and repeat business as a preferred supplier. Marketing spend can be reduced and can be used to target new customer groups to build a sustainable customer pipeline for future growth. Conversely, those who set themselves low standards from the start are unlikely to excel at delivering great customer service and their businesses will suffer.

Technology is the key to getting this right:

- Getting the most effective technology on board is essential when setting the customer satisfaction bar high – it is the only way to ensure that the most appropriate skills, expertise, tools, and materials are dispatched to the customer, in the most efficient way. It provides the channels for real-time, two-way communication between customers and operatives, making sure that customers know that their time and availability is respected and that their convenience is a priority.

- With the most appropriate software solutions on board, the focus can shift to customer service training. Digital software itself is simple and intuitive to use, freeing businesses to focus on customer relations training for all customer-facing roles, including field operatives. At the end of the day, the human touch is what makes a memorable and successful customer experience. A friendly face, with simple explanations of next steps can make all the difference and will drive repeat business and positive reviews from happy customers.
- Without technology and staff that understand the value of customer-orientated service, organisations cannot expect to succeed in today's highly competitive marketplace, where the customer is king. Be a digital leader and beat your competition with economy and the best-in-class customer experience.

The P word brought with it many challenges, but for the consumer it undoubtedly propelled a revolution in customer service. The field service sector is already responding to the 'age of instant gratification' and adopting new and proactive ways to deliver improved customer experiences and those who implement the latest digital solutions are leading the way.

Building successful relationships

Powerful digital solutions can enhance the human touch, streamlining processes to help customer service professionals deliver a more efficient and customer-focused service.

At Advanced, we pride ourselves on supporting millions of people across the UK by delivering exceptional enterprise and market focused software and service.

Get in touch