Strictly business, but personal

By Wynand Smit   17 Aug 2017

In the movie, *The Godfather*, Michael Corleone, as played by Al Pacino, utters the immortal line to his on-screen brother, "It's not personal, Sonny, it's strictly business." For a long time, this has been the strategy of companies seeking to stay competitive. Recent years have seen this maxim turned on its head; to be successful, your company should be spreading the news that "it's not just business; it's personal."

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We're all out there, hustling to ensure that our companies are progressing, reaching a wider market and doing what we do well, and the future success of our efforts demands that we personalise what we have on offer to our consumers. They expect us to know them; their needs, expectations (and even their dislikes), and to respond accordingly.

Behind the scenes operations for customer-facing excellence

Customer experience is the sounding board for companies by which you can tell if you're getting it right. Unlike the secretive underworld activities of the mobsters portrayed in that iconic movie, your company is operating in an environment that's always presenting a face to your customers, whether you realise it or not: from the agents assisting in the contact centre to the seemingly disposable world of social media, you have multiple touch points where your customers expect to be assisted, reassured or, occasionally, apologised to. How you respond to this makes all the difference.

Your customer wants to:

Be heard, have their concerns acknowledged, be responded to and for all interactions to be relevant to them, based on what you know about them. In order to deliver on these preferences, you need to know who you're dealing with and adapt accordingly. Each touch point in a customer-company interaction has the possibility that it can become a pain point – too many of those and negative word of mouth could have a big impact on the reputation of your business.

Did your customer request resolution to a specific problem, only for the agent to be ill-equipped to deal with it? Perhaps this was down to insufficient training, a lack of access to relevant information, inefficient processes or a lack of integration into relevant business systems that will provide the insight needed to problem-solve? These are the kinds of challenges that can discourage building and maintaining a positive customer-to-company relationship.

If your customer has come up against pain points, it's important to acknowledge that you've let them down, and to work towards avoiding reoccurrences by identifying and remedying problem areas. At all points of contact, the relationship needs to be a constructive one, recording in detail what's going on, who your customer is, what they like, how they've interacted with you in the past and what they expect going forward. Your contact centre agents may be excellent at service delivery, but they're not mindreaders – feeding data-driven insights back into operational areas (like the contact centre) is critical to driving ongoing service and business improvements.

Customer personalisation

All of the touch points leave a data "paper" trail – clues that add up to a better-defined profile of your customer. These clues need to be aggregated and accessible so that agents can deal with the whole customer profile rather than just fragments. All these customer profiles can be used to help address your customers more personally, directly and with increased efficiency.

Ultimately, personalised service contributes towards fantastic customer experiences. If you're not doing that, the customer will sense that their individual needs are being dismissed – "it's just business, not personal."

The Godfather isn't necessarily the best business model, but if you remember, he knew each of his associates personally, and knew how to get what he needed from them, and, reciprocatively, give them what they need.

Perhaps Michael Corleone got it wrong – it was personal, all along.

ABOUT WYNAND SMIT

Wynand Smit is CEO at INOVO, a leading contact centre business solutions provider.
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