



PRESS RELEASE

Tellumat

July , 2010

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Keep it in the business unit, and above all, keep it personal!

Tellumat shares notes on setting up after-sales customer service

For almost all sizeable companies with multiple product-centric divisions, a compelling case can be made for not getting a central 0800 or 0860 service number. Instead, they should set up divisional support, argues Achmat Rylands, managing executive of leading technology group Tellumat's customer service centre (CSC).

A centralised customer support structure can never attain the level of knowledge or dedication to customers that a sales unit naturally develops, says Rylands. "Usually when phoning a central line, a customer joins a queue. And most often, they only get a reference number and a follow-up call."

Disadvantages

Rylands concedes there are drawbacks to decentralised service. To inculcate a service culture throughout a big company takes some doing. In such cases, he says, quality assurance (QA) is key – through customer satisfaction surveys, ISO 9001 certification, customer audits, and service level agreements (SLAs).

Also, there is the problem of resource duplication. But while many functions should indeed be centralised (such as the aforementioned QA, supplier management and finance), decentralisation is crucial to the success of other functions, such as sales and support, Rylands contends.

"There are benefits and disadvantages to both models. When approached correctly, the divisional approach is the only true means of ensuring personal accountability and on the ball support," he says.

Horses for courses

While many companies have multiple product-centric business units and are thus textbook cases for divisional support, Rylands says every company is different, and a wide range of factors can influence the structure of an organisation's customer service organisation.

"Depending on the business model of the unit, it may serve either a retail customer base or go via distributors. In the former instance, the business on the whole is geared to service a lot of smaller clients. In the latter, it is not."

"Some groups have retail units as well as wholesale units, which complicates things. In such cases, keep it simple by hosting wholesale customer service in-house and partnering with a customer service specialist on the retail side."

It gets even more complicated than that, he says. "The unit may itself be a distribution partner to a global vendor, meaning it is not in a position to do swap-outs or very in-depth repairs. Such units should not offer more than first-line support – higher levels of support should be reserved for the areas of the business that have their own intellectual property."

Some tips

If you do decide to go the divisional route, a few considerations are in order, Rylands says.



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- When setting up and marketing direct in-bound support lines to all responsible personnel, ensure the proper diverts and escalations are in place.
- As a minimum, implement divisional call-logging systems, ensuring they are standard across the enterprise and will scale as the business grows.
- If you fear dealing with masses of service requests, find a business partner. If not, skill up to offer the range of services that ties in with your strategy – which may have the additional spin-off of growing return business.
- Train and accredit the partner and sign a royalty contract. Market conditions may require that you cut a local service company into the sale, in which case you should be protected against losing repeat business. Protecting yourself in this way will protect the customer too, if something goes horribly wrong.
- Above all, keep it personal, whether that means your key account managers must travel, or you have to set up a local office or appoint a regional partner.
- Incorporate quality assurance in the form of ISO 9001 or other means (SLAs, surveys, etc)
- Propose several SLAs to one customer if it has relationships with several business units. That way they don't get the runaround.
- Always encourage SLAs, or you will be overrun by small, unpredictable ad hoc service requests.

Tried and tested

Contrary to popular belief, a 0800 or 0860 number won't magically solve your customer service issues. Many companies grow up doing their customer service delivery divisionally, and this tried and tested method works, for obvious reasons.

But there is no single approach to fit all circumstances. Your skills, product diversity and business model all have a great influence on exactly how you set up and man your divisional customer service.

Ends.

About Tellumat

Tellumat is an innovative, black empowered, South African technology company that has achieved a B-BBEE Status Level 3 rating, as well as being a "Value-Adding Enterprise" in terms of the DTI's Codes of Good Practice. It consists of three major trading divisions; Communications, Defence and Contract Manufacturing, and three partly owned companies; SIA Solutions (Pty) Ltd, Eence Engineering (Pty) Ltd and SIMpill (Pty) Ltd. Tellumat services three primary market areas, namely wireless voice and data communications, defence communication systems and high precision electronic and mechanical manufacturing. Tellumat is a world-class business focused on innovation, offering our customers dynamic and competitive technology products and services. We focus on understanding our customers' needs and forming long-term strategic alliances with likeminded enterprises worldwide.

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