Customer Expectations: Improving Customer Satisfaction by Using a Self-Service Portal

By Robert Sombach

By 2020, customers will manage 85 percent of their relationships with enterprises without interacting with a human. (Source: Gartner)

The number of consumers preferring automated self-service has doubled to 55 percent in the last five years. (Source: Convergys)

These are two striking statistics facing your service organization today. Many of us equate service with the onsite work that needs to be performed on a regular basis. Since much of our interaction in the weights and measures industry includes onsite work, it may be difficult to envision that interaction being 85 percent automated. If we broaden the definition of interaction to include:

- Requests for a service call
- Follow up on the status of a call
- Request for certificate/documentation back up
- Billing information
- Historical device/account information

It then becomes apparent that many elements of our customer service model could potentially be moved from a personal interaction to an automated one. There is often a danger for companies to equate personal service with good customer service. It is not always the case. Customers are often looking for specific information and there may be only one person in your organization that has access to it. Consider a customer looking for certification documentation, or an update on a service call; tracking down the correct person and having them dig through data while the customer waits patiently on the phone, may

not be the most efficient use of time.

The second statistic about the number of consumers preferring self-service is also surprising. While it may seem high, what is important to realize is that there is a large segment of the population that has been taught to resolve their issues without human interaction. As more of your customer information becomes contained in a database, there is an expectation that information is always accessible. Most of us expect that credit card and bank statements are always available online. We would not typically call a bank and ask for statement information. Customers now assume they'll have secure web access to their information.

An optional feature in Miracle Service software is the Customer Portal. This self-service portal can help your company begin the transition toward providing your customers with automated service. Without your interaction, clients can:

- Open and track the progress of service tickets
- View order status
- View certificate information

Another obvious benefit for your business is that employees do not need to drop everything to service a client. They can be more productive, prioritize and manage tasks on their time. It's easy to view automation as turning your back on customer service, but it isn't: as the above statistics prove, many customers prefer automation.

Perhaps the best way to look at the statistics is this: 55 percent of your clients DO NOT PREFER personal customer service.

About the Author:

Robert Sombach is Vice President, Operations and Development, for Nexent Innovations Inc., providers of Miracle Service, Service Management Software. www.MiracleService.com