

Viewpoint:

When it comes to Customer Service - Collaboration is Key

In the fast paced and competitive world of logistics, businesses are under increasing pressure to ensure that customer service is at the heart of everything they do. Failure to do so too often results in the customer service experience breaking down. Simon Clark, Vice-President Business Development at CargoWise looks at the role customer service plays in the logistics sector and how knowledge sharing is crucial in delivering best practice.

Have you ever been in a restaurant and been impressed with how a waiter remembered you from a previous visit? Perhaps they remembered the way you like your steak cooked or just genuinely listened and responded to your needs. The chances are that if you have, you will undoubtedly return because the overall experience pleased you.

The logistics sector is no different. What we can learn about a customer can determine what, where and how we engage with a customer. From the way we market a product, to the medium by which we communicate with a customer or organize a sales pitch – knowledge really is power.

Collaboration workforce

There are many ways to improve customer service. In recent years for example, the logistics sector has led the way in introducing lean processes as a step towards achieving operational excellence. By ensuring that all processes from the back office to customer facing ones are all working smoothly, firms have been able to reduce the number of issues that have arisen.

Really successful businesses are the ones that are collaborating early across departments to ensure that critical knowledge is turned into business intelligence. The relationship between customer service departments and marketing teams is a case in point.

Customer service is a critical external touch point for customers. When a customer service representative receives a call, this creates an opportunity to collect and share vital information about issues that are causing the customer pain. If shared with other business units, such as marketing, the team is able to channel specific messages that help ease those pain points and build meaningful relationships with customers.

Likewise, customer service is not all about the reactive nature of handling issues or disputes. It should be a fundamental part of the way freight and logistics companies operate. Firms should be proactively aligning business processes, information exchange, and business review mechanisms to ensure that when things are fine all involved know, and that when things are not fine all involved know how to remedy the situation. Successful marketing departments are doing this by skilling customer service teams to not be transaction driven around incidents or inbound enquiries, but rather to be facilitators of direct communication around deeper business conversations.





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Simon Clarke
Vice President Business Development - Europe

IT can join the dots

Many freight and logistics companies will have an accounting system that they will pull financial analysis from when required. Some will have an operational system to handle the freight and logistics administration, from which they can also pull operational data. All too often these systems are siloed, making it impossible to take a holistic approach to a client's business. As a result, many firms simply shy away from the proactive customer service approach and rely on reacting when issues occur and when relationships start to fail.

IT enables businesses to be smart about the way they interact with customers. It can also help pull together these otherwise siloed pieces of information and give an accurate holistic view of the customer – ultimately creating invaluable business intelligence that can be shared across teams.

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) applications for example, can provide critical business intelligence, but all too often they're not used to their full potential. Instead companies use ad-hoc email systems and lengthy spread sheets, meaning that when business intelligence is required it is almost impossible to align it with the financial and operational information obtained. What is really required is the use of an IT solution that encompasses all key areas of operations, finance, and sales to heighten the level of customer service that can be provided to clients and partners

Once information is pulled together and managed centrally, the next step technology can play in improving customer service enabling access to information instantly anywhere in the world. For example, if a sales representative is meeting with a

customer, if both parties are able to access the same information online, both parties can address any conflicts of interest in real time - allowing them to strategize and move on.

A CRM solution that allows such functionality whilst being totally integrated with the operational and financial systems for an all-encompassing view is a real plus in ensuring that the business processes defined are leveraged to go to the next logical step – astonishingly high levels of customer service.

There's no doubt that technology and the internet is changing the face of business and in particular, the way in which businesses interact with their customers. Technology has also meant that we now have access to an explosion of information, which can be accessed and analyzed anywhere in the world. If harnessed correctly, this information can be used as vital business intelligence ensuring that logistics firms are proactive and able to foresee things for their customers. This is where exceptional customer service really comes into play, because in a competitive industry like logistics – collaborative knowledge sharing benefits the bottom line.

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More than 80,000 licenses across a customer community of 4,000 sites in 75+ countries move goods through the global supply chain daily using CargoWise solutions. Its team of more than 230 employees operates worldwide from offices across the U.S., Europe and Asia. For more information visit www.cargowise.com

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