



Customer Service NEWSLETTER

The authority on managing the customer contact center

Case Study

IBBS shortens its average handle time by looking at “moments of truth”

Integrated Broadband Services (IBBS) provides integrated online voice, data, network operations, and support services to more than 230 broadband providers, primarily in more rural markets in the U.S., Canada, Latin America, and the Caribbean. And some of these customers are very small, almost mom-and-pop types of operations, “where they could go into a grocery store and run into one of their local customers,” says Suzanne Dunham, senior vice president of customer service for IBBS. “And we don’t want them to hear complaints from their customers that our online and technical support couldn’t help them.” To make sure that doesn’t happen, IBBS takes a very customer-focused approach to service.

Basically, what IBBS provides, says Dunham, “is a diagnostic tool that our customers use to manage their plant and operations, and around that tool we offer a full suite of support services.”

In fact, she adds: “Our diagnostic tools are very useful, and we use them ourselves for diagnosing issues, but our customers use them

too. So we are all using the same platform for the same view of the end customer. We also use the same tool for ticketing and dispatching to end-user customers.”

The IBBS call center has about 120 employees and operates 24/7, 365 days per year. “And when our customers’ customers are having difficulty getting onto the Internet, or they are having trouble with their email or their VoIP phone service, they will call an 800 number that comes into our call center, and we manage all of the technical support for those users,” Dunham says.

IBBS customers have their own local field service operations, however. “That way, if we can’t get the user online because they need to have a service call to their house,” Dunham says, “we open a dispatch ticket and send that to our customer. And then our customer dispatches a field technician. So communication is really the key.”

Looking at “cycles of service”

IBBS was confident in the quality of its diagnostic tool, but with that kind of shared service responsibility, it also wanted to make sure that the service experience from the end customer’s point of view was a positive one as well, so it began to look at its service offering in terms of customer “moments of truth” and “cycles of service.”

“My area of expertise is really around how we can improve the customer’s experience,” says Dunham, whose background includes customer service/call center experience in banking, trucking, and technical environments. She introduced the idea of “moments of truth” to her service staff. This concept comes from Jan Carlzon’s book *Moments of Truth*, and “refers to any interaction that a customer has with your organization in which they can form an impression of your quality of service,” she says. The notion of “cycles of service,” on the other hand, comes from Karl Albrecht, author of *Service America!*, “who took the idea of a ‘moment of

A “moment of truth” refers to any interaction that a customer has with your organization in which they can form an impression of your quality of service.

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truth' and said that customers perceive an interaction with a company in terms of an entire cycle of these 'moments of truth,'" Dunham says. "For instance, if they call an 800 number to get back on the Internet, their cycle of service would be made up of all of the moments of truth that the customer may go through interacting with us to get the problem solved."

To illustrate the process for her team, Dunham simply took a circle and identified, the point of entry to the interaction and every moment of truth that a customer experiences going around that circle until they get their issue solved. (See this month's Web Extra for an example.)

"Employees can really grasp that," Dunham says, "and it is a lot easier for them to understand than a flow chart. The trick is looking at what is happening to the customer through the process. So we put a road map together basically by asking, 'What is the next thing to happen to the customer, and what's the next thing that happens?'"

Identifying "moments of truth"

In one case, Dunham says, her team put together a cycle of service for a customer issue where call handle time was averaging "about 8 minutes and 47 seconds." Dunham adds, "We are always concerned about call handle time, not just for cost reasons, but because, in our business, a call is a problem — people are calling because something is broken or not working — and the last thing they want is to be on the phone forever to fix it. So we feel we are providing much more improved customer

service if we can get to the heart of the problem faster."

The team started by ranking the number of calls that it was getting for each problem category.

Then they looked at the issue that was getting the largest volume of

calls — which was basically customers not being able to get on to the Internet.

"So we said, okay, there is a cycle of service calls related to connecting to the Internet," Dunham

says. "And we started by identifying every moment of truth our customers were experiencing with our reps while they were trying to get the customer back online."

Because it didn't have a clearly documented process or protocol for this type of call, Dunham and her team spent hours listening to recorded calls and doing side-by-side observations with reps to iden-

tify moments of truth. What they learned, in addition to identifying that non-documentation of the process was a problem, is that there was a varying degree of rep knowledge across the calls, and that in almost every case, reps were automatically power-cycling, or asking customers to turn their computers completely off and on again, regardless of the situation. They also observed that power cycling only fixes the problem about half the time, and more often than not, it made customers angry because they had already tried turning their computer off and on again.

Power-cycling the computer was a routine process that service reps had customers do in the days before the advent of multiple routers, PlayStations, and other equipment being attached to the modem. "So we immediately changed that process," Dunham says, "and we started power-

"We built a series of what we call 'call flows' that our reps now use to get through customer interactions more quickly."

Training for a positive customer experience

What kind of reps does it take to provide a positive and unique customer service experience to IBBS customers? Suzanne Dunham, SVP of customer service, says that "primarily, the folks who come to work for us do not necessarily have degrees in computer science, but they have got to have some familiarity with or experience in understanding the Internet."

Training for new reps lasts for three weeks, she says, "and during that time we train people about the cable and broadband industry, and then we do a lot of training in the troubleshooting tools that they will be using. We kind of go from the cable connection to the computer to the user. Sometimes there are user issues, and a lot of times there are router issues. With more people attaching more stuff to their routers these days, the job is bigger than just looking at modem connectivity any more. And we are looking for folks who are comfortable being able to troubleshoot that."

IBBS also introduces new hires to its cycles of service and its overall customer experience culture during the training process. "We kind of hang our hat on three behaviors in customer service," Dunham says, "and they are that our goal is to be reliable, responsive, and resourceful in every interaction with a customer. What we are attempting to do is not just to satisfy customers, but to try to create more loyalty than before the problem or issue ever happened. We want those customers to hang up and say, 'That was the best technical support experience I ever had.'"

cycling some of the equipment that was being attached to the modem, because that was where a lot of the problems seemed to be.”

Once reps started power-cycling the router or the modem instead of the computer, IBBS found that it was solving the customer problem in 68 percent of the time, and solving it in a lot less time. “We immediately took almost a full minute off our average call handle time,” Dunham says. “And when we talked to our development team about what we were learning about all of these ancillary devices on the modem, they upgraded our diagnostic tool to give us an easy way to view all of the devices that are hanging off the modem.”

Documenting a service protocol

Dunham’s team followed up on this by going through the same process — doing a cycle of serv-

ice analysis — with the other top five reasons why customers called, “and within a little less than a year and a half, across all of our calls, we had taken a full two minutes out of average handle time,” Dunham says.

The results of IBBS’s cycles of service analysis also helped the company in terms of creating a more documented protocol for handling different types of customer calls going forward. “We built a more sophisticated internal knowledge base that our reps now use,” says Dunham. “And we built a series of what we call ‘call flows’ that are simply the work flows that our reps use now to get through customer interactions more quickly.”

She adds, “So, if the customer is calling in for this reason, the rep can just click on their screen to call up that particular call flow, and it will come up and give them all of the recommended steps.”

And if reps encounter a problem that is not in the knowledge base, they can click another button “that sends an immediate alert to our training manager, and he can get that information and provide the documentation as quickly as possible,” Dunham says.

IBBS’s cycles of service analysis has also helped to build a closer relationship between the service team and the product development team. “The development team recognized that the service group was using the diagnostic tool in the same way that customers were using it, so they said, let’s start using you guys as our user group — or think tank — for improving the diagnostic tool going forward,” says Dunham.

*Contact: Suzanne Dunham, Integrated Broadband Services, www.ibbs.com. Dunham did a presentation and workshop on IBBS’s service-cycles at last month’s ACCE conference. For information go to www.acce.com. **GSN***