

Two service metrics to watch in 2009

The January issue of *Customer Service Newsletter* offers perspective and advice from a number of service experts on what to expect in 2009. Two of those experts offer the following advice on important metrics to watch in the coming year.

It might seem contrary to what other experts are saying, but one of the most important metrics that companies can track in 2009, says Kimberly King, president of InterWeave Corp. and author of *Is Your Call Center Really WOW?*, is “talk time.”

“You can tell a lot by ranking your reps from the lowest talk time to the highest talk time,” King says. “Those that have the lowest talk time are not using courtesy words, not offering other products and services, are possibly cutting customers off and maybe even dumping calls on other people. Those who have the highest talk times, on the other hand, could be having extra conversations that are unnecessary, or taking too much time to navigate the system or searching for the right information to tell customers.”

“Those people who have the lowest talk time are also likely to

have the lowest sales, the highest rate of escalations and complaints, the highest rate of customers having to make repeat calls, and the lowest levels of customer satisfaction. Those who have the highest talk time probably don’t know your system or your products, and are causing your company excess money unnecessarily,” King says.

Once you rank reps by their average talk time, King says, “you can listen to their calls and drill down to the behaviors that are causing excessively low or high talk times — and then coach to those behaviors. You will find that by changing the specific behaviors, all your other metrics will fall into line.”

Renée Evenson, author of *Award-Winning Customer Service*, on the other hand, suggests that an important metric to watch is your

customers’ perceptions of your customer service levels. “Giving great customer service may be the difference between keeping your doors open and closing your doors for good,” she says.

Track your customer service levels through external means, she suggests, such as customer surveys. “You can also train employees to conduct market research by observing and listening closely to what customers say. Get to know your customers and why they come to you. Discuss customer comments with your reps and find innovative ways to do what you do better,” Evenson says. “Even if customers are not in the buying mood, they may need other services you could offer.”

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