RingCentral®

LONG HOLD TIMES ARE KILLING YOUR CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

A guide to building your business
around the customer

Introduction

Waiting on hold to get help is inevitable. That being said, long wait times, being bounced around to multiple people, and inability to resolve issues contribute to overall poor experiences for customers and businesses.

Time flies when we're having fun, and it drags on when we're bored. Sometimes it's on our side, and other times it's racing against us. 90-seconds can feel like an eternity when you're sitting on the phone waiting for help, or answering automated voice prompts, or even waiting for a response from an agent on live chat agent.

So, the question is, what does that mean for your business and how can you handle hold time better in every part of your contact centre?

Wait a minute—what do long hold times feel like from the customers' perspective?

Research shows that how people feel while waiting matters more than the length of the wait. Shep Hyken, a customer experience expert and bestselling New York Times and Wall Street Journal author, has often thought about how to convey the feeling of being put on hold to the crowd at one of his many speaking events. Instead of relying on stats or stories, he says:

"I asked the VP of marketing to the stage in the middle of the speech to deliver a special message. He walked on stage to a nice round of applause. He took centre stage and looked at the audience. Once the applause ended, he just stood there in silence, and that silence was, as they say, deafening. He continued to look out into the audience, not uttering a single word, for 90 seconds. The audience became very uncomfortable. I then came back on stage, thanked him, and asked the audience to give him a round of applause as he walked off stage. The audience wasn't sure what had just happened.

I asked the audience how long he has been on stage. Many of them said three or four minutes. No, it was just 90 seconds."[1]

Did you know?
90 seconds is the average customer hold time.[1]

44% of customers would rather clean a bathroom for half an hour than spend 30 minutes on hold with customer service.

Inbound Opportunities:
Minimise Hold Times Whenever Possible

RISK
Negative experience with your brand.

Patience is a virtue, but it's not a given. Wait time can be a frustrating roadblock for consumers on their journey to getting questions answered or problems solved. And while at times a slight delay is unavoidable, when it does happen, it's important to make sure it's over as quickly as possible. The longer customers are made to wait, the greater the chances are that they will grow frustrated with your brand—sometimes so much that they share that negative experience when talking to peers or post on social media about it. Plus, nine out of ten customers tell others about a bad customer service experience.[2]

OPPORTUNITY

Obviously, minimising hold time should be the goal. A contact centre platform that monitors activity and let's admins make on-the-fly adjustments when queue times start to increase. In the event that a hold time is unavoidable, it's important to ensure that your staff is trained to treat hold times with care and consideration for the frustration that this hold may be causing customers. Have an apologetic prompt at the ready—and urge agents to make up for lost time with stellar service. After all, 53 percent of customers share positive comments online.[2]

RISK
Higher abandoned call rates.

When customers are put on hold, there's no guarantee they will wait. It's no secret that as average handling time goes up—so do abandoned calls. The speed at which customer questions and concerns are handled consistently ranks as one of the most important factors from the customer's perspective. Let's face it, frustrated customers take their business elsewhere.

OPPORTUNITY

Put yourself in the customer's shoes and try to waste as little of their time as possible. A modern solution for this problem is to utilise a contact centre platform that allows for queue callbacks. This let's customers request a call back once an agent becomes available according to their place in line. This can curb the tendency for callers to give up on customer service and gives them time back in their day.

Outbound Opportunities:
Proactively Connect with Your Customers

RISK
Customers can't get in touch when they need to.

When customers get to the point of calling into a contact centre, chances are they already have a problem on their hands that they can't resolve themselves. They may have tried to troubleshoot the problem on their own—without success or gone days without a product or service they've paid for. As anyone who's dealt with customer service can vouch for, calling into a contact centre is often times a last resort.

OPPORTUNITY

Like a waiter coming by your table to check in on your meal after you've had the chance to take the first few bites, organisations have an opportunity to reach their customers using outbound campaign to not only ensure they're happy and satisfied with their product or service but also tell them about additional products or services and ongoing promotions. When your organisation is the one reaching out first, you're in a better position to control the conversation and the number of agents on the phone or digital platforms at a given time—ultimately cutting down on unexpected incoming calls. Make the connection on your terms, ensure satisfied customers and upsell/cross sell given the opportunity.

RISK
Annoying for customers with even a slight hold.

Imagine ringing a customer's phone, they dash to pick it up and say "Hello?" only to be met with dead air or a long pause before your agent starts to speak. This situation may have just blown your opportunity with a strong lead or your chance at a sale. Customers' time is precious and they don't like to be made to wait, especially when an organisation is the one reaching out.

OPPORTUNITY

Modern cloud contact centre platforms allow organisations to leverage campaign-specific diallers. Automatically call the next best lead on the list as soon as at least one agent is available using the right dialler for that campaign. A progressive dialler for example can help to drive productivity while still optimising the customer experience by managing lead lists and only dialling when at least one agent is available ensuring no dead air when the customer picks up.

Digital Opportunities:
Avoid Hold Times All Together Through Digital Channels

RISK
Wasting agents' and customers' time with what could have been a self-help situation.

Not all customer service questions are unique to that individual, in fact many can be anticipated in advance such as, "Where do I send me return?" or "I need to reschedule my appointment." Help customers help themselves by giving them another route to contact your organisation, and get the answer they were looking for without ever having to speak to a live agent.

OPPORTUNITY

Giving customers the opportunity to contact your organisation on a channel outside of a phone call can free up agents who would otherwise be tied to helping a single customer via a phone call and adding to increased wait times. While sometimes a phone call is the most necessary way to communicate and many people still prefer to call customer service, more people (i.e., millennials and Gen Z) see chatbots and instant messaging as normal methods of communication.

RISK
Lowered NPS by being unavailable on customers' preferred channels.

When customers call into your support centre, they are typically diverted through the interactive voice response (IVR) function to the agent with the skills to resolve that particular issue. In today's digital world, businesses can implement IVR deflection so customers can, for example, click 1 for Facebook Messenger or 2 for WhatsApp, to continue their conversation when an agent becomes available. Rather than wait on hold, the customer receives a link via SMS to pick the conversation back up on their channel of choice, saving them time and increasing overall satisfaction.

OPPORTUNITY

A 2010 article in the Harvard Business Review, which has stood the test of time, de-emphasised the idea of "delighting the customer," which many contact centre companies were touting as the most important endeavour.[3] They argued that customer effort to solve a problem was just as important in determining NPS. By aggregating channels and making communications with customers on their channel of choice easier, you're minimising customer effort and and solving for a major influencing factor to your NPS as this chart shows.

76% of customers would prefer to get customer support via chat-based messaging if they were guaranteed to get an immediate response.

Improve hold times through technology

Customers expect fast service, easy resolution, seamless access to live representatives and the ability to contact an organisation outside of a phone call. Pay extra attention to hold times and how long it is taking the average customer to get through. If you notice that lengthy hold times are attributing to lost sales and poor customer experiences it may be time to re-strategise using technology.

Offer more detailed information on how exactly to contact the person they need to speak to.

Sometimes customers have to jump through hoops to get in touch with the right person, even if they already know who that person is. Not to mention agents end up wasting valuable talk time redirecting customers. Where possible, add additional IVR options, offer shortcuts for callers, and make it as simple as possible to get the right person on the phone.

Improve your self-service options.

If customers could help themselves wait less, don't you think they would want the option? Invest in artificial intelligence (AI) options to help handle simple information requests and save more difficult requests for agents. The more things customers can do on their own, the less time your agents will need to spend talking to them.

Simplify the long list of choices.

Every customer has been there, listening to an overcomplicated litany of choices trying to figure out which button to press—only to miss the one they were listening for, increasing their hold time, not to mention their frustration. Make it easier on callers by offering directions that are as clear and concise as possible.

Improve hold times through technology

Make it easier for customers to speak with a live person.

A lot of times, customers are calling about things that can't be handled by technology. Streamline the process by making it obvious how they can connect to a live agent. Then, let customers know how long wait times really are.

Give customers another way to get in touch.

When hold times do begin to escalate give customers the option to select a callback and get them off the phone quickly. Or, allow them to contact you via a social or digital platform of their choosing such as Facebook, Twitter or email.

Incorporate chat bots for easy self-service.

While some people still prefer to call customer service and some circumstances still warrant it, more people and younger generations see chatbots and instant messaging as normal methods of communication. Digital communication with organisations will likely continue to grow as those who grew up during the digital age come to represent a larger percentage of European consumers.

SOURCES:

1. hyken.com
2. businesswire.com
3. Harvard Business Review

#SHOW THEM YOUCARE

Contact centres can be difficult to lead, but with the right technology and when executed successfully, they have the potential to make impactful customer impressions that lead to lasting relationships and strong sales. Interested in learning how you can make your customer experience the best it can be? Contact us for more information or request a product demonstration to learn more about RingCentral's collaborative contact centre and digital engagement solutions.

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