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Sales and Customer Retention: When Selling Goes Beyond Making the Sale



Sales and Customer Retention

Adding value is a key differentiator in any sale. As the sales process progresses through the steps of guiding the call, discovering needs, providing solutions, closing the sale and improving all package upsell metrics, critical performance factors aligned with customer experience requirements are defined. Each sales team member is accountable for meeting standards aligned with customer experience requirements. Critical performance factors are monitored and coached throughout the sales process to build revenues, grow loyalty and retain customers. Some of these factors include:

- Quality and quantity relation
- Effective listening methods
- Proper use of open- and closed-end questions
- Gaining customer permission throughout needs discovery
- Individualizing features and benefits to solidify final agreement with the customer
- Overcoming objections
- Finalizing/closing the sale and asking for an expression of satisfaction.

In addition to adding value, ACS also understands the importance of building a strong knowledge base among team members. We believe it's our duty to find and train agents who have a certain base of knowledge and intellectual curiosity necessary to help customers find the options. ACS customer care and sales experience spans two decades and includes:

- **Customer Loyalty** – Service is the most important facet of the customer experience and determines whether a customer will remain loyal or move on. ACS builds customer loyalty by providing a consistently superior customer experience each and every time.
- **Saves** – Keeping customers engaged rather than canceling their service (the original purpose of their call) – is a primary component. Our sales agents provide information on added values and can include “sweetening the pot” (i.e., enhancing their current deal based on client-defined parameters) to keep a customer.
- **Upselling and cross-selling** – ACS agents in the sales arena go through extensive training in upselling, cross-selling, and offering additional bundled features and products. For wireless clients, for example, opportunities to upgrade on devices or add additional “family” accounts are common, as are modifications to current contracts that extend the period of obligation.
- **Additional products** – Maintenance agreements, extended loss prevention warranties, etc. – are offered based on specific client needs.
- **Shipment method** – Express shipping options generally are more lucrative and can be a component of the upsell.

Keys to Success

Keys to ensuring both customer care and sales (upselling, cross-selling or prospect-to-customer conversion) are consistent:

- **Clearly defined, measurable goals and empowered agents** – Studies have demonstrated that customer satisfaction increases as agent job satisfaction increases. Measurements and goals are critical to an agent's success, and metrics enable an objective analysis of how a contact center measures up to goals and expectations, and serve as a foundation for successful performance management initiatives. Agents must be empowered with the authority necessary to take action to mitigate and/or resolve customers' problems. An agent can be as knowledgeable as they come, but if they are not empowered to act on a customer's concern, customer loyalty is seriously compromised. Organizations must empower agents to be proactive – to actively identify, intervene and optimize rather than wait and react.
- **Targeted agent sales training** – Great agents are not necessarily great salespeople. An agent may know the product base thoroughly and be able to articulate very well but, if they aren't able to meet the customer's needs and close the sale, they've succeeded only in talking well on the call. Leading contact centers understand that effective agents are developed through training and coaching. By providing agents with the personalized training, meaningful feedback and the information they need to perform at their best, the contact center will perform at its best.

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Simple yet effective sales techniques such as active listening, probing to spot unmet needs, identifying potential opportunities, and expertise in overcoming objections, can increase sales closures dramatically. Individual attention given to agents in an effort to improve their sales techniques and increase the sales closure rate is a sure-fire way to develop a sales champion. These sales champions will have a direct impact on revenue and profits, and reduce the cost of sales. Fewer calls will be required to realize a greater volume of sales.

- **Engaging an activity-based compensation (ABC) program** – ACS uses an incentive compensation plan referred to as Activity-Based Compensation (ABC) as a motivational payment program for our employees. ACS uses ABC as a compensation strategy to achieve long-term goals by setting short-term objectives. ABC is a variable-pay system built right into an employee's base pay, and hinges on the achievement of specific metrics. Agents are paid according to how well they deliver on the immediate needs of the client.

Sales in Action

The following brief case studies are evidence of ACS's experience, our commitment to clients and our philosophy on results-driven service delivery.

Hughes Network Systems

We received the 2006 Outsourcing Excellence award from the Outsourcing Center, the outreach and communications arm of the Everest Group, one of the world's most renowned outsourcing advisory companies. ACS won in the Best BPO category, honoring the company's successful relationship with Hughes Network Systems (HNS), the world's leading provider of broadband satellite services, networks and products.

ACS leverages a range of BPO contact center services to support HNS, including inbound sales, development and management of a specialized reporting system, and implementing new quality control initiatives. Sales from Direct TV advertisements are an integral part of the success for ACS in our support of HNS. A 24-month commitment is required from the customer on all product sales, and ACS agents enjoy the pay-for-performance compensation structure of this lucrative program. Hughes deployed an ACS portal integrating its ordering system with the contact center agent interface, offering a real-time look at individual performance statistics. This technical integration can tie a phone line to a call, a sale, an agent or a promotion, and display the results online. Activity-based compensation programs and detailed reporting are provided as well. Metrics developed jointly between HSN and ACS will determine compensation rates for sales productivity and quality. For example:

- Agents are paid on a "per-sale" basis for every sale of a particular product bundle.
- Compensation rates per sale are determined based on the agents' most recent quality scores.
- A robust online reporting package is in place for HNS reporting, as well as for internal operations and performance management.
- ACS Supervisors and Operations Managers closely manage daily sales performance.

Results...

- Doubled sales
- Reduced costs by 30 percent
- Developed detailed reporting for ROI of marketing spends

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Wireless Communications Provider

One of the top three providers of fully integrated, wireless communications services partnered with ACS to increase its sales volume. The client experienced tremendous growth since 1999, when it initially outsourced its new activations work. It was successful in implementing new subscriber sales programs, but up-selling current subscribers was becoming an increasingly important source of revenue growth.

In a maturing wireless marketplace, customer churn is the leading problem facing wireless providers. Its goal in working with ACS was to maximize both the subscriber and new product revenue growth opportunities. In selecting ACS, it believed it was selecting a partner that could help it grow revenue, build loyalty and improve the customer experience. In addition, the client faced rapid program and product growth, leading to inconsistent training and coaching. Caller hold times and fraud levels had also reached unacceptable levels due to rapid subscriber growth.

Solution:

- Developed system application to increase sales opportunities for agents.
- Launched ACS's proprietary LMS training tool to reduce training time, making agents productive sooner.
- Specialized recruiting and training programs to build a highly skilled, efficient staff.

Over 50 percent of inbound customer service and outbound activation calls provide our agents with an opportunity for sales-related activities. Agents focus on identifying up-sell opportunities, including contract renewals, new features and contract enhancements.

A complete Life Cycle program including Welcome/Verify, FCC Q&A, Proactive Retention, Collections and Premier Club support was implemented, providing customers with premium care. These inbound and outbound programs are supported out of Houston, TX; Portland, OR, and Juarez, MX.

Implementation resources designed a specialized interactive pop-up application to help agents focus on identifying logical up-sell opportunities throughout the call progression. ACS also created a center-level management structure whose sole focus is on driving sales. This dedicated sales focus ensures quality sales and fraud prevention.

From 16 agents working in a single site in 1999, ACS has grown the relationship to more than 7,000 dedicated agents handling over 50 million calls per year across 13 centers. In addition to the Life Cycle program we support back-office processing (case management), corporate customer care, activations, lost and stolen handset/device services, dealer and credit services, English and Spanish customer care, and hardware upgrade services.

Local and Long-Distance Provider – ACS Is #1 New Vendor in Quality

- Qualified for Client's Top Center ranking every month.
- Improved performance metrics every month since project launch.
- #1 new vendor in Quality.

ACS provides residential and small business telecom services for the client's customers including installs, billing, and new lines, add services, priority customer service and technical help desk. ACS is highly effective at up-selling Local and Long-Distance lines, Phone Guard, Inside Wiring and International Calling Plans. Agents are dedicated to addressing every customer need and every call has a 100 percent required up-sell attempt. Our bilingual agents handle approximately 8,000 calls per day both in English and Spanish. ACS's program in Argentina competes with other vendors worldwide (Manila, India, Mexico, U.S. and Canada).

Sales and Customer Retention

National Agent for Multiple Broadband Providers

Our Inbound sales team provides services for this national client, a premier marketer of broadband services for most cable and DSL providers including: Charter, Insight, Mediacom, Qwest, Verizon and AT&T. ACS's agents are trained to profile customers and sell service packages based on availability and location. ACS achieves an average sales conversion rate of 27 percent across all providers.

ACS's technology solution allows for the timely modification of IVR messages and shell scripts in response to ever-changing product and service offerings. Agents provide valuable trend analysis acting as "eyes and ears" for the client. The client relies on our staff to alert it of any common issues that arise, usually the result of a technical issue or inaccurately published numbers from one of its providers.

Credit Card Activations and Sales Solution

ACS provides inbound and outbound sales agents for multiple credit card issuers, including one of the largest full-service banks in the world. The client was in need of a partner who could provide high-end customer service during activation calls while also pursuing additional sales of add-on products. ACS provides both activations and product offers with professional, friendly and knowledgeable agents in our Call to Activate department. We spend a great deal of time and effort to ensure that the customer experience is a pleasant one, while still remaining diligent in our pursuit of add-on product sales to generate revenue for our client. ACS successes with this client include:

- 250 percent increase in up-sales of identity theft solution in one 15-month period
- Ranked #1 in five of the eight client product lines supported
- Achieved first-place ranking for 75 percent of all performance metrics.

We Partner With Clients for Sales Success

ACS has the expertise, talent, resources and determination to deliver the absolute best sales and customer retention programs to our clients. We provide thought leadership and innovative best practices gleaned from what we know works effectively in our global operations. ACS is committed to our clients' success. We will do whatever it takes to ensure our clients achieve their goals and remain successful. But we don't achieve the success by ourselves.

We firmly believes each client relationship is also a partnership. We work together with our clients as partners, leveraging one another's strengths to be successful.

You can learn more about us at www.acs-inc.com.

