

UK Consumers Speak With Their Feet Over Inconvenient Customer Communications

Submitted by: Citizen Relations

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Inconvenient customer communications have resulted in one in four UK consumers snubbing, or becoming reluctant to use, organisations' products or services, according to new BT research released today.

This means that consumers could have deserted companies such as their bank, retailer or utility company in favour of the competition simply because they can't reach them how and when they want.

Companies' use of electronic channels came in for particular criticism. Despite recent advances in customer service technology, more than one fifth of the population has had to resort to the phone or post in the past two or three years simply because they have no faith in receiving a response to requests made via email or the Internet.

The research, commissioned by BT Ignite Solutions, shows that:

- A quarter of the population has had to contact businesses at an inconvenient time or in an inconvenient way
- Half the population complained that they had to contact many different people, rather than just one, when making inquiries
- Four in ten people agreed that they often experienced "deadtime" when they would like to get in touch with companies but were unable to do so
- One in five respondents had not used or did not go back to companies that failed to respond to email or Internet contact

Andy Huggett, eCRM Marketing Manager, BT Ignite Solutions, said: "If businesses do not pull their socks up and improve customer service, they could face millions of pounds in lost revenues as consumers lose patience and transfer their business to the competition. Businesses need to take note of the alarming consequences of not meeting their customers' needs and begin to focus on delighting and thus retaining customers."

However, it is not all bad news for UK businesses as consumers are willing to try new approaches and

customer service techniques as long as they meet their specific needs. The research reveals a widespread appreciation of many of the benefits of using electronic channels and a willingness to use them.

The concept of self-service options was positively received. In fact, seventy per cent of respondents believed that it was important that businesses offer a variety of self service options for accessing information about products and services 24 hours a day.

Nearly two thirds of respondents would be happy to use the “self-service” option of entering their own personal details into a database to avoid agent error. Nearly 60 per cent would use email, Internet or an automated phone service if it meant they could obtain information and services more quickly.

However, the research indicated that people use a mix and match approach when dealing with companies. Many select a combination of methods of communicating with businesses, blending traditional methods of face-to-face, personal telephone and post contact with newer options of automated phone, email and Internet services.

Andy Huggett added: “This research shows that customers are keen to embrace new ways of dealing with businesses as long as they are convenient and enable customers to access information quickly and easily. BT Ignite Solutions has the expertise to help businesses deliver consistent and convenient communication across all channels. We can work with businesses to make sure that they provide joined-up services to all customers, whether they are contacting them via phone, fax, email, the Internet or mobile phone.”

Other findings from the research showed:

- Integrating different channels of contact is key – avoiding a fragmented response where customers are passed from one person to another before getting an answer to their query
- The Internet is failing users as a standalone customer interface tool – 45 per cent of Internet users have experienced problems navigating web sites
- More than a quarter of Internet users wanted help from an operator whilst online
- The British public still prefers face-to-face or telephone contact to online and email communications
- The era of post is over – only nineteen per cent of people cited post as one of their preferred methods of communication across the finance, retail, utility, government and travel sectors, compared with 32 per cent who cited electronic communication channels

BT Ignite Solutions was able to draw out the following conclusions from the research, giving an insight

into the top priorities of the UK consumer when it comes to customer service.

In terms of achieving the greatest customer satisfaction, top tips for businesses from UK consumers are:

1. Make it quick
2. Give me one point of contact
3. Don't make me repeat myself
4. Be there when I need you
5. Or if you can't be there, give me the means to help myself

-ends-

Notes to Editors

About BT Ignite Solutions

BT Ignite Solutions is the e-business and communications solutions unit within BT Ignite. The business provides solutions to help its clients to optimise customer value in an IP enabled world. Providing consultancy, e-business, e-CRM and network-centric applications, BT Ignite Solutions delivers and manages solutions on behalf of many of the world's largest and most respected organisations. BT Ignite Solutions is the largest provider of managed and outsourced network and IT solutions in the UK. It has more than 27,000 customers ranging from mid-sized companies to multi-national organisations in 92 countries across the globe.

For more information, visit: <http://www.btignitesolutions.com>

About the Research

This research was carried out by MORI (Market and Opinion Research International) on behalf of BT Ignite Solutions to gain an insight into consumer opinions of multi-channel customer service.

MORI interviewed a nationally representative quote sample of 1,972 adults aged over 15 across 198

sampling points in Great Britain. Interviews were carried out face-to-face, in the home. Data was weighted to match the known population profile. All interviews were conducted between 7 – 13 February 2002.

A whitepaper detailing the findings of the research will be available free of charge at <http://www.btignitesolutions.com> from May 1, 2002.

About MORI (Market & Opinion Research International):

MORI is the largest independent full service research agency in Great Britain, set up in 1969 by current chairman, Professor Robert Worcester. The company is organised into client-facing specialist business areas including new media, business-to-business, consumer and retail, corporate communications, telecommunications, travel and tourism and international research.

For more information about MORI, please visit: <http://www.mori.com>

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