UK COMPANIES FAIL ONLINE CUSTOMER SERVICE TEST

Submitted by: Speed Communications

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Research finds catastrophic inability to answer basic customer questions

Cambridge, UK: Leading UK companies are failing to provide online answers to even the simplest customer queries. Research carried out by eCustomer service software provider Transversal found that 64 per cent of leading consumer web sites answered fewer than two out of ten of the most often asked customer questions. Only 16 per cent could answer five or more questions successfully.

Nearly half of the organisations surveyed (44 per cent) also failed to respond to customer questions escalated by email - and those that did took an average of 33 hours to reply. These damning statistics highlight critical flaws in how major organisations approach the online market.

The research surveyed fifty leading organisations in the travel, banking, insurance, consumer goods and telecoms sectors. It asked ten common, sector-specific questions on each site, as well as emailing a single question to the organisation's customer service department. Responses were marked for relevance and for time taken to respond.

Web sites in the strongest sector - banking -could only provide adequate answers to three out of the ten questions asked. The worst sector was telecoms, which could answer just one of ten questions on average. Scores varied greatly between individual companies surveyed - with 34 per cent unable to answer any questions at all.

For frustrated customers forced to submit questions by email, response rates were equally dismal. 60 per cent of travel companies did not bother to answer emails at all and those that did took an average of 42 hours to respond. The highest number of responses came from telecoms companies (70 per cent) but they still took over a day to reply - 32 hours on average.

Tardiest of all were consumer electronics companies who took an average of 51 hours to respond to email. The fastest average response time came from the banking sector. While one stood out with a response within two hours the rest averaged 17 hours - hardly the immediate answers that online consumers are looking for. Response rates were only calculated on those organisations that actually answered the question and excluded automatically generated holding replies.

 "Given the growth in the online channel over the past five years, these figures demonstrate an astonishing lack of understanding by the average organisation," said Davin Yap, CEO, Transversal. "Our research shows that there is a growing customer service chasm between those companies that take online seriously and those that don't. Consumers on the web want answers now - they don't want to have to wait days for an email response or be forced to call a contact centre. However many organisations seem to be forcing customers down these channels through an inability to answer simple questions in a timely manner."

Nearly 50% of UK consumers use the web as part of the purchasing process for goods and services and it is estimated that over 60 per cent of emails to contact centres are generated by consumers unable to find

answers on company web sites.

The survey was carried out in February 2005, with researchers visiting leading UK websites, following a set methodology. Average results are as follows:

Average number of questions answered online:
Banking 3 out of 10
Insurance 2.5 out of 10
Consumer Electronics 2.4 out of 10
Travel 1.2 out of 10
Telecoms 1 out of 10
Average 2.1 out of 10

Percentage of companies that responded to email
Banking 60 per cent
Insurance 50 per cent
Consumer Electronics 60 per cent
Travel 40 per cent
Telecoms 70 per cent
Average 56 per cent

Average email response time
Banking 17 hours
Insurance 25 hours
Consumer Electronics 51 hours
Travel 42 hours
Telecoms 32 hours
Average 33 hours

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Enquiries:
Transversal
Dee Roche, Head of Marketing 01223 723 388 dee.roche@transversal.com

Rainier PR
Chris Measures/Gareth Davies 0207 494 6570 cmeasures@rainierpr.co.uk

About Transversal
Transversal, founded in 1998 by top researchers from Caltech and Cambridge universities, is a Cambridge-based developer of intelligent eCustomer service software that enables organisations to achieve key sales, customer service and efficiency goals. Transversal's flagship service, Metafaq, enables organisations to increase online sales and reduce the volume of call and email queries to contact centres by automatically answering customers' questions online. Transversal customers will typically see

immediate and dramatic email reductions, by around 60%, and improvements in email response times, from days to minutes. Intrafaq, Transversal's knowledge management solution for contact centres, delivers information to agents in a unique way from a dynamic natural language knowledgebase. Simply by typing a question, in their own words, agents can access answers to customer questions; providing fast, accurate and consistent responses. Organisations benefit from increased first call resolution and efficiency by improving the knowledge and quality of service provided by customer service and help-desk agents. Transversal's Memory Engine™ is the result of research and development by top researchers in Information Theory and Machine Learning from Caltech and Cambridge universities. Transversal co-founder, Prof. David MacKay, is a world renowned expert in Artificial Intelligence. He pioneered Bayesian Neural Networks in the late 1980s and remains at the forefront of the field. Current customers include Sony, Direct Line, MFI, Nissan, Fujifilm, TDK Systems, JP Morgan Chase, Nissan, DfES, Proctor & Gamble, Triton and the British Army.

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