

MVNO Customer Care

From Acquisition to Loyalty in the Fast Lane

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In This White Paper

- Customer acquisition can be expensive so careful consideration must also be given to customer retention.
- Thinking like a customer will help create empathy and increase customer retention.
- How customer service plays a pivotal role in an MVNO organization.
- How to establish and keep an emotional bond between your customer and your brand.

Introduction

“It costs a lot of money to acquire new customers so it’s important to keep the ones you’ve worked so hard to gain.”

The MVNO (mobile virtual network operator) market is heating up with new players like Amp’d Mobile, Visage, Mobile ESPN and Helio leading the charge. These companies are coming to market with unique and specialized services targeted at very specific customer demographics. With those specialized services comes a need for quality customer care that provides the right service to the right people at the right time.

For most MVNOs, the first several months of business operation is focused on one thing and one thing only: customer acquisition. But as new customers are acquired, careful focus must also be given to retention. As any traditional telco will attest, it costs a lot of money to acquire new customers so it’s important to keep the ones you’ve worked so hard to gain. As new MVNOs launch, it’s critical to know when to switch the focus from customer acquisition to customer loyalty, and most importantly, how to keep the cycle going to bring in the new, and keep the old, simultaneously.

The following four steps will help MVNOs begin leveraging customer care in ways that helps grow their business one customer at a time.

Step One: Think Like a Customer

Specialized customer care plays a critical role in the acquisition phase as new users are introduced to the MVNO’s “brand” for the first time. Imagine a Mobile ESPN subscriber’s shock if the contact center agent didn’t know the difference between Annika and Anikan? Consider a Helio subscriber’s disappointment if the agent didn’t know about MySpace?

The mantra “think like a customer,” is very important when hiring and training customer care to work in the MVNO market. The MVNO and service provider space caters to a very specific niche segment of users that all share common characteristics. Because of this fact, it is essential to first identify the demographic and socio-cultural aspects of the average MVNO consumer before the acquisition phase even begins.

For example, Amp'd Mobile began working with its outsourced customer care provider before it even launched its first product.

There are four common questions you should ask in order to define your audience and find the right customer care agents. They are:

- What is the average age of your consumers?
- Is your product associated with any particular lifestyle or group such as retirees or GenerationY?
- How technologically competent are your consumers?
- Based on geographic location, is there a need for Spanish-speaking agents?

Once those demographic and socio-cultural traits are identified, the contact center can mimic the customer by hiring and training agents that fit in that same demographic. For example, Amp'd Mobile caters to a customer demographic that primarily consists of young music fans while other MVNOs may target older adults who are only interested in phones with bigger numbers and bare bones service plans. Therefore, it generally would not make sense for a middle-age agent to field calls from teenagers or a young person to understand the needs of a senior citizen.

This mimicking of the customer has proven very effective in the past because it establishes a common and shared language between consumer and agent. It also enables one of the most important words in all of customer care: empathy. You must be able to relate to and emphasize with the caller on the other end of the phone. This ultimately makes for a more positive customer care experience since they can understand each other on every level.

Step Two: Become Brand Focused

During the acquisition phase, it's also important to train agents to become familiar with the brand image of the MVNO so they can tailor customer care accordingly. For example, Disney Mobile caters to families with younger children who are very familiar with the Disney brand image. Whether it is the

recent release of the Pirates of The Caribbean movie sequel or the popularity of the Disney Channel's hit TV shows, people flock to the Disney brand. It is important that the agents are familiar with these titles and new releases as well, even if they are not a part of their direct job function.

One practice that has proven effective in familiarizing customer care agents with a specific MVNO's brand is having them serve as beta testers of new MVNO devices and applications. This allows agents to develop first-hand knowledge about the products and services in order to better relate and emphasize with customers. At the same time, the MVNO receives valuable insight that can be used for quality assurance and product development; a win-win situation for all.

Step Three: Keep Customers Loyal

After the MVNO has established strong early relationships with acquired customers, it is time to move into the retention phase with those customers. Quality customer care has the ability to keep customers happy and satisfied in the early days, but great customer care is what leads to customer loyalty. Allegiance can be a fickle thing amongst a customer demographic constantly bombarded with new options.

Today, due to de-regulation of certain industries and fertile new emerging-growth markets, customers have a myriad of choices. With these increased choices comes obvious competition which can often benefit the customer. Because customer service is now able to be a key competitive differentiator, companies need to have a strategic customer service plan in place.

One of the biggest mistakes companies make is underestimating the role customer service plays in an organization. Customer service has the ability to either bolster or diminish a brand name. For example, think about the coffee chain Starbucks. The company has established a consistent feel of service that becomes almost comforting to the consumer. So, whether you are in Dallas, Texas or Paris, France the customer service will be the same and customers will keep going back because of that service.

Step Four: Retention Phase - Establish (and Keep) an Emotional Bond

During the retention phase, agents are trained to establish an emotional bond with customers so they'll keep coming back. As previously discussed, agents are hired from the same demographic as the customers, so there is a shared and common language leading to a greater understanding between the two parties. An emotional bond develops naturally between the agent and customer. For example, a Mobile ESPN customer can feel comfortable knowing he can chat to the agent in customer care about the latest play in the All-Star game or the first draft pick for a hot basketball team all while getting the technical help he or she needs.

Summary

As the MVNO market continues to evolve, it is critical that customer service continue to be a core component of the business plan from day one. Once customer care becomes part of a company's fabric, it can be the difference between customer satisfaction and loyalty; customer acquisition and retention.

About Sitel

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