

**Jabra®**

# HOW MUCH DO YOU VALUE YOUR CUSTOMERS? VOICE AND THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE



A report from Jabra

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

**The call centre is very much the customer service 'front line'. Whether customers want to contact an organisation on the phone, via email, text or any of the other methods now available to them, in most cases, their query will be handled by a call centre agent.**

In recent years organisations have worked extremely hard to maintain and improve call centre service quality. Many have invested in additional training for agents, new technologies and extending the availability of agents in their quest to deliver greater functionality and ease of use to agents and customers alike. But are customers happy?

We wanted to find out whether these investments were paying off. In many ways that prompts the question: what is exceptional customer service in the call centre? And does the 'perfect' experience exist?

**Does the perfect call centre experience exist?**

We wanted to find out which elements of the call centre experience make your customers feel most valued? Have any of the fundamental elements of a quality customer experience been overlooked? And are consumers making full use of the tools available to them in today's multi-channel call centre environment?

Ultimately we wanted to look at where the weaknesses are and help companies target the areas of their customer service that make most different to their customers. We commissioned YouGov to question 2,000 adults about their experience of contacting customer service teams.

This report presents those findings - in particular looking at critical elements of customer services, often details that are easily overlooked. We also examine some of the tools that are readily available to address these areas and help call centres move closer to the perfect customer experience.

1. The survey was conducted using an online interview, with members of the YouGov Plc GB panel of 350,000+ individuals who have agreed to take part in surveys. An email was sent to panellists selected at random from the base sample according to the sample definition, inviting them to take part in the survey and providing a link to the survey. The total sample size was 2008 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken in September 2011 and the survey was carried out online.

## 2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Customer services in the call centre remains one of the key functions that helps organisations keep customers happy and loyal. A bad experience with a call centre can easily mean lost revenue and of course the reverse is equally true. And yet, in the past 12 months 87% of people have experienced problems when contacting customer services.**

To try and get to the bottom of this we commissioned a survey of 2,000 people to ask: "What is exceptional customer service in the call centre?" We wanted to find out how satisfied consumers are with their experience of contact centres, what makes customers feel valued and whether they are making full use of the communication tools available to them.

In our search for what constitutes the 'perfect' customer experience we discovered that many customers are still experiencing problems that are long-standing issues for customer services. Whether it was waiting times, or unknowledgeable agents our research has confirmed that these issues, highlighted by Jabra's 'Value of Voice' report in 2010, continue to pervade.

Perhaps more surprisingly we uncovered some potential reasons for this - that customers actually consider the quality of communication as important as the content. We discovered that:

- Sound quality is a key element of the perfect customer experience and customers want high quality voice interaction with call centres; 82% of people said they wanted to feel like they were having a private conversation with agents.
- Improving the sound quality in the call centre can have a significant impact on customer satisfaction and the propensity to purchase; 53% of people said that they would be less likely to purchase a product or service if a customer service call was affected by excessive background noise.
- 'Niggles' like audio quality are the details of customer service that are often easy to overlook - but they can be easily fixed.

This report looks at how organisations can focus on the "secondary", seemingly small details that are easily overlooked, to provide a seamless customer experience across multiple channels that makes customers feel valued.

## 3. HOW MUCH DO YOU VALUE YOUR CUSTOMERS?: RESULTS BREAKDOWN

### 3.1 Does the 'perfect' customer service experience exist?

Customer services have very much become a multi-channel experience for customers and agents alike. Even so, our research confirmed that the phone is still the preferred communication method for 50% of the consumers we surveyed.

We wanted to find out how satisfied consumers were with the quality of phone contact they had experienced over the last 12 months.

Significantly we discovered that most people had experienced some sort of problem with customer services. In fact only 3% of respondents indicated that they had not had any problems when speaking with call centre agents.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the number one issue highlighted by respondents was too-long call waiting times, cited by 68% of people.

However, our research also uncovered a perhaps less widely understood issue: the quality of audio. Two thirds of people were unable to understand the call centre agent they were speaking to (66%). **More unexpectedly, 31% of people also experienced excessive background noise on calls with customer service agents - suggesting that the former problem is more than just a case of difficulty understanding the accents of agents.**

As Figure One below shows, a wide range of different issues show that the 'perfect' experience remains a rarity for consumers.

**Figure One**

| Which, if any, of the following problems/issues have you encountered when contacting an organisation with a customer services query over the phone in the past 12 months? | Percentage of responses |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Having to wait a long time before my call was answered                                                                                                                 | 68%                     |
| 2. Not being able to easily understand a call centre agent                                                                                                                | 66%                     |
| 3. Having to listen to irritating hold music                                                                                                                              | 65%                     |
| 4. Being charged to make the call                                                                                                                                         | 64%                     |
| 5. Customer service agent(s) with a lack of knowledge relating to my query                                                                                                | 50%                     |
| 6. Not being able to find a telephone number to contact them on at first                                                                                                  | 40%                     |
| 7. Excessive background noise over the phone                                                                                                                              | 31%                     |
| 8. The customer service agent had no record of my previous calls/complaints                                                                                               | 31%                     |
| 9. Not applicable - I haven't contacted customer services in the past 12 months                                                                                           | 9%                      |
| 10. Other problems                                                                                                                                                        | 8%                      |
| 11. Not applicable - I have not had any problems when contacting call centres in the past 12 months                                                                       | 3%                      |

#### Observations

- The results show that the quality of the audio experience - one of the easiest elements to change - has a big impact on the customer experience
- The vast majority of customers have experienced issues when contacting customer services in the past 12 months
- Many of the complaints highlighted - long waiting times; difficulty understanding agents; agents lacking knowledge of issues - match the findings of Jabra's "Value of Voice" report in 2010, demonstrating that many of the issues customers experience are long-standing

### 3.2 What is exceptional service in the call centre?

Today's contact centre is increasingly focusing on the quality of the customer experience. So we asked consumers to tell us what they consider to be the top priority for exceptional customer service and what made them feel most valued as customers.

Our research shed new light on this question, as well as confirming some long-term consumer preferences, which are listed in Figure Two below:

**Figure Two**

| Which ONE of the following do you think is the MOST important aspect of excellent customer service? | Percentage of responses |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. When customer service agents are knowledgeable and can deal with a variety of issues effectively | 38%                     |
| 2. When my query/issue/complaint is resolved quickly                                                | 36%                     |
| 3. When I am able to contact customer services in a variety of ways at times convenient to me       | 13%                     |
| 4. When customer service agents are polite and courteous                                            | 9%                      |
| 5. Don't know                                                                                       | 3%                      |
| 6. None of these                                                                                    | 1%                      |

#### Sound quality is a key element of the perfect customer experience

Yes, what people want from call centres is quick, clear, efficient service from knowledgeable agents who are aware of previous queries. But we discovered that quality of communication is just as important as the content for today's consumers.

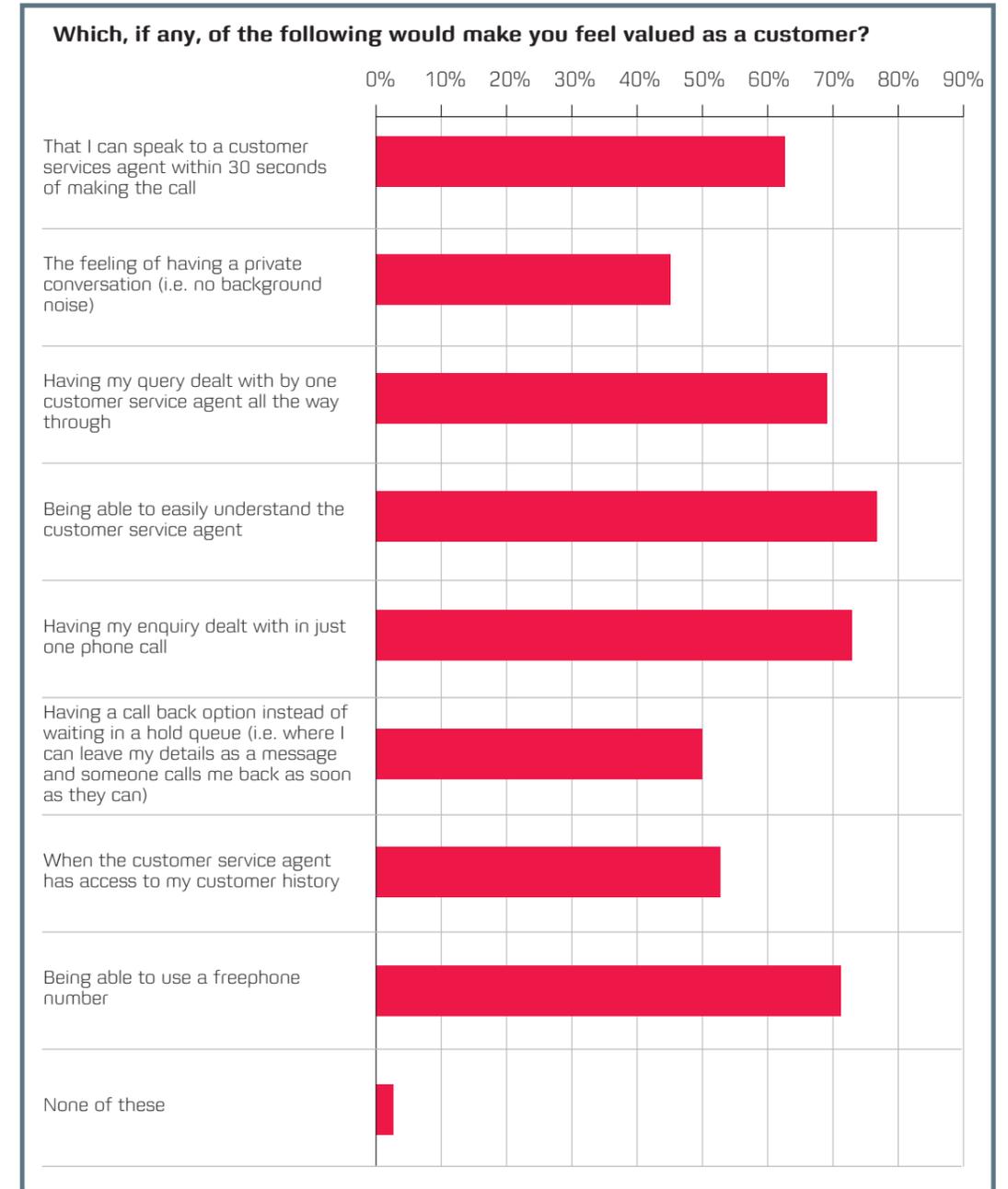
Not surprisingly, over three quarters of people said they feel valued when they are able to easily understand the agent (77%), but interestingly a **staggering 82% of those surveyed agreed that they appreciate the sensation of having a private call with customer service agents.**

This is especially important as 73% of people also indicated that they would be more likely to use the phone if they were contacting an organisation about a sensitive, financial, health or other personal issue.

And it seems that this feeling of having a private conversation is a key element of the perfect customer experience for many; nearly half of the responders (45%) said that it was a crucial element of making them feel valued (see Figure Three).

Sound quality also has an impact on the bottom line; 53% of people agreed that they would be less likely to buy a product or service if they can hear background noise over the phone when speaking with agents.

**Figure Three**



#### Observations

- When using the phone, clarity is a key issue for customers
- The ability of customer service agents to multi-task is critical to the customer experience. People do not want to be passed around agents and want the first person they speak to be able to deal with their query
- Those surveyed have also demonstrated that they want agents to be able to easily access background information/records and to add to them while speaking with customer services
- Other elements that made customers feel valued were having a query dealt with in one phone call (73%) and having queries dealt with by one agent from start to finish (69%). Over half of those questioned (53%) want agents to have access to their customer history (see figure three).

### 3.3 Are customers making full use of the communication tools available to them?

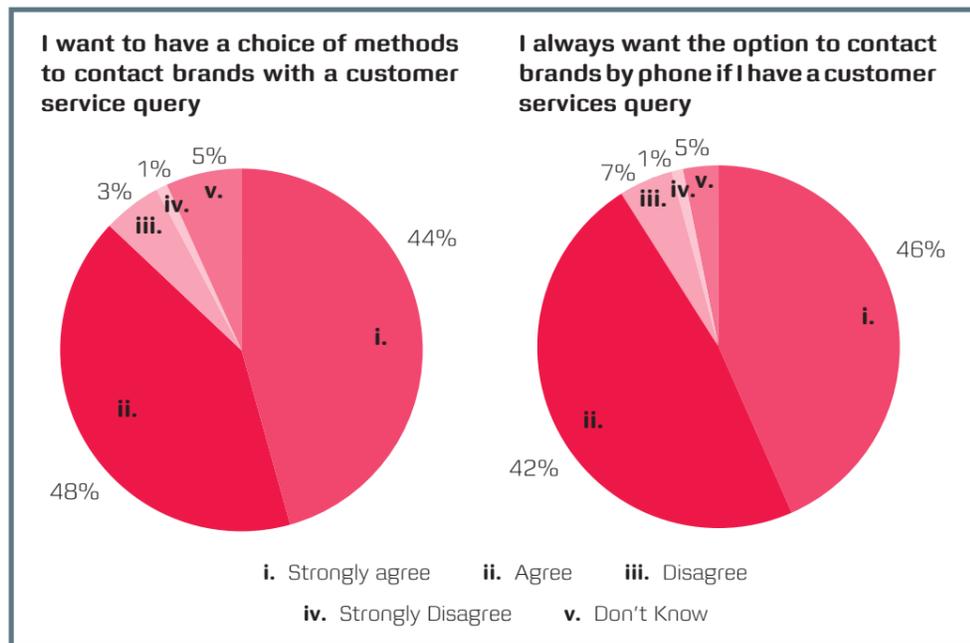
While many customers still experience problems when contacting customer services this is not due to a lack of commitment on behalf of organisations; many companies have invested in a range of new tools and technologies in order to make it as easy as possible for customers to contact them.

But are people making use of these tools?

While 88% of those questioned said that they want the option to call customer services, 92% of people agreed that they wanted a choice of communication methods. And 59% of people said that they are using these alternative communication tools on a regular basis

In today's multi-channel world customers do not want the option of the phone at the expense of alternatives.

Figure Four



#### Observations

- Younger people are more likely to make use of alternative communications tools (not the phone) - 23% of 18-24 year olds strongly agreed that they often use alternative methods compared to 13% of those 55 and older
- 48% of 18-24 year olds still prefer to use the phone however
- But it is not only younger people using the alternatives - overall 54% of the 55+ age group agreed that they make regular use of other communication tools as well as 56% of those 45-54 years old compared to 60% of 18-24 year olds
- Providing communication tools for customer service enquiries is not a case of "one size fits all". The customer service systems, agents and the overall organisations need to be flexible enough to deal with a range of customer needs, expectations and behaviours

## 4. PRIORITIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**Organisations have made significant steps in improving customer service in recent times - in particular when it comes to certain key performance indicators. However, as this report has shown, customers are still experiencing a range of niggling issues when they are contacting customer services.**

This is a critical point for customer service teams - having invested in new technologies, systems and training it is important that all of that effort is not let down by the details. Indeed a recent analysis by Bright\* suggested that companies are focusing too much on certain high profile performance targets, losing focus on equally significant secondary customer satisfaction issues such as agent knowledge and engagement.

The other key issue thrown up by this report is the audio quality when interacting with customers over the phone. Improving the sound quality in the call centre can have a significant impact on customer satisfaction and propensity to purchase.

Often companies are wary of addressing these issues as it involves incremental costs on top of what may already be a sizeable investment. However, is it worth 'saving' what can often be minimal additional cost if these niggles lose you loyal customers?

Reinforced by the findings in this survey, we have highlighted below the key details that should not be forgotten by organisations in search of the perfect customer experience.

### 4.1 Taking care of the details in the call centre

#### Audio quality & noise-cancellation

As our research showed, when people contact customer services they want to feel like they are being listened to and that the agent is focused on their call. **Excessive background noise is a key issue** and one that can negatively effect customer service interaction - especially when people are calling about sensitive issues.

The right investment in headsets or other communication devices with adequate noise-cancellation is invaluable and will return investment within a short period. If using the latest unified communications (UC) technology, it could also be as simple as getting headsets and handsets that are properly optimised for your new UC platform to take advantage of the full wideband audio capabilities of UC.

#### Multi-tasking

Our research has clearly demonstrated that customers want to interact with customer services in a variety of ways. As previously stated, customer service frameworks, agents and companies themselves must be flexible enough to deal with a range of customer needs, expectations and behaviours. So whether a customer is young or old, on the phone or sending an email, calling regarding a sensitive matter, contacting a company about a variety of issues or getting in touch about a previous problem, organisations need to ensure that their call centre agents are able to handle the situation.

For agents that might mean they need to be able to easily access multiple desktop applications, contact colleagues while on the phone, move around the call centre while on the phone with a customer or combine phone calls with email, text or instant messaging contact.

Helping agents to perform in this way can be as simple as **providing them with suitable headsets that enable to be clearly understood while keeping their hands free to perform other tasks** while talking to customers.

#### Non-voice to voice interaction

Multi-tasking is even more of a crucial factor as links between communication methods develop. As shown by our report **voice is still a critical method of communicating with customer services**, but people are increasingly using the alternatives that are available

\* Analysis by Bright UK of 500,000 2010 customer satisfaction surveys. Results announced September 15 2011 <http://www.brightindex.co.uk/2011/what-really-drives-c-sat-and-why-should-we-care>

to them, and new technologies are beginning to tie voice more closely with non-voice interactions. For example, a “click to chat” function enables customers to move from talking online to connecting with an agent with a voice call. This can be a powerful tool for customers. Organisations must ensure that the transition is seamless, maintaining the high level of personalised service and that agents are able to quickly and easily respond.

#### Quick resolution

Of course enabling call centre agents to multi-task more effectively also has a knock on effect on one of the other top issues highlighted by our research - quick resolution of issues. This should not simply be viewed as how quickly calls are answered, or how long customers are on hold, but how quickly agents are able to understand and solve their issues and questions.

One of the key factors that customers consistently pointed to was agents having proper access to their customer history. Call centre agents should have easy access to full customer records, not just limited sections, while they are in contact with customers.

## 4.2 Optimising communications tools for world class customer service

Headsets are already a common part of a call centre agent’s job and as such it is often easy for them to become one of the details that organisations overlook when they are thinking about ways to enhance customer service. However, this report has shown some of the key issues that continue to annoy customers and headsets can help support moves to address these concerns in a number of ways.

#### Audio Quality

The right noise-cancelling technology minimises background noise and helps to give the impression to customers that agents are speaking to them privately. Too often than not, call centres do not invest in this technology and assume basic microphone technology will do the job, what it does though is potentially cost them revenue by lowering customer satisfaction. Organisations choosing to deploy ‘duo’ headsets with two ear pieces can also incur improvements in audio quality. Duo headsets naturally lower the overall noise level in the call centre because agents are not struggling to be heard over their colleagues. UC offers further gains in terms of audio quality as UC wideband audio provides a much richer, clearer sound. UC optimised headsets make full use of this capability. Traditional telephony ‘narrowband’ clips the voice quality and this often results in the need for repetition on a call. To the user, UC headsets provide a much more lifelike experience of a face-to-face conversation which can have a significant impact on user productivity and customer service.

#### The right headset for the right user

When combining UC within a call centre environment it is important the device decision is not taken as a one size fits all for the entire organisation. Suddenly a headset decision does not just sit with the Call Centre Manager, but forms part a broader communications strategy. For example the call centre agent demands a different device to perhaps an infrequent user of voice who needs to multi-task during calls.

By deploying comprehensive user profiling techniques, **Jabra can help their customers to match end users with the right hands-free communications device** to ensure they are fully-equipped for optimum efficiency in the new multi-tasking environment.

#### Mobility and productivity

It is almost too obvious to mention, but the great advantage of headsets is the ability to speak on the phone hands free. However, in the context of improving customer service in the current multi-channel environment clearly this is something that cannot be neglected. Whether agents need to access desktop applications, contact colleagues while on the phone using instant messaging, move around the office to speak with other agents while still being available on the phone or being able to send additional information to customers while speaking to them on the phone, **headsets allow agents to perform multiple tasks at once**. Similarly customer service representatives who are working from home need the right equipment to maintain seamless levels of customer service.

## 5. CONCLUSION

**The call centre remains at the heart of the customer service experience. Much work has gone into improving this experience in recent years, but where the aim is to provide seamless customer service this report has shown that there are still issues to address.**

Interestingly the issues that customers have highlighted in our research are factors that it is often tempting to overlook – details that are perhaps ‘secondary’ concerns. Chief among these is the issue of sound quality. This is an area that can have a huge impact on customer satisfaction, and an area that in fact is relatively straightforward to solve.

If organisations truly believe in delivering the best customer service then these issues cannot be viewed as ‘secondary’. To really enhance customer satisfaction these issues must become central to organisations’ customer services.

For example, as mentioned previously, where customers are able to make use of new technologies to move between non-traditional online communications tools and traditional voice contact, getting the online tools right is only part of the big picture. The transition between the two methods and the sound quality of the voice call must be as high as the online functionality.

Companies must ensure that they focus on these all-important details of customer service as much as the ‘big issues’ - it would silly to, for example, allow a significant investment in new technology to fail to improve customer satisfaction because people are distracted by excessive background noise, irritated by the hold music used or not able to find your contact details easily on your website.

#### About Jabra

Through its Jabra brand, GN Netcom is a world leader in innovative headset solutions. With around 1,200 employees and sales offices around the world, GN Netcom develops, manufactures and markets a broad range of wireless headsets for mobile users and both wireless and corded headsets for contact centre and office-based users. GN Netcom’s business activities also include its original equipment manufacturing (OEM) business. GN Netcom is a subsidiary of GN Store Nord A/S.

For further information, please visit [www.jabra.co.uk](http://www.jabra.co.uk)

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