



Simple tips on how to WoW people over the phone.

Customer service is King – without customers you don't have a business so whether contact is face to face, by email, by letter or, as is most common today, by phone the impression you make is of paramount importance.



And the way you answer your company's phone will form your customer's first impression of your business.

In this age of targets a number of call centres and organisations guarantee to answer the phone within 4 or even less rings. By the way, don't answer the phone too quickly, the caller may not be prepared and could easily hang up.

Great, except how often have you heard a grumpy voice giving you the impression that you're a b****y nuisance for interrupting a quiet nap, or they're just not ready for your call. A possible exaggeration but we've all had that experience.



A few things to bear in mind when answering the phone:

When you deal with customers over the telephone, it is important to remember that it is a substitute for face-to-face conversation:

- you cannot see the callers' facial expressions, manners or reactions nor can they see yours. However the tone and intonation in your voice will convey much more than you may be aware of.
- you cannot see what the other person is doing nor can they see what you are doing. Nonetheless be careful not to be distracted by doing something other than concentrate on the call, you may miss something of vital importance.
- you cannot lip-read what the other person is neither saying nor can they lip read you. Always enunciate your words clearly without over exaggeration. We've all seen the cartoons of the typical Englishman endeavouring to explain something to an overseas visitor with minimal command of English, as the conversation deteriorates so our character speaks louder and louder. DO NOT employ this tactic, unless of course you want to lose a client.

· there's no point in thinking an illustration will help – we don't have the technology in place just yet

Now for some practical tips.

Always answer the phone professionally

The guide lines for answering a telephone are simple and need to be reviewed regularly. Here are four we've found to work well;

1. Use the four answering courtesies:
 - Greet the caller
 - State your organisation (or department)
 - Introduce yourself
 - Offer your help
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"Good afternoon, The ABC Company, John French speaking. How can I help?"

It can be helpful to mention the company name as we often get a number of callers who have misdialled and by mentioning the company name we can end the call quickly and of course in a polite manner after all you don't want to spend ages looking for a non – existent person.

2. Show enthusiasm when you answer the telephone. It helps make the caller feel welcome. A tired voice lacking in enthusiasm is very unappealing and reflects on the professionalism of your organisation. And use friendly phrases as part of your greeting.

- *"Thanks for calling."*
- *"May I help you?"*

3. Control your language when answering the phone. Don't use slang or jargon. Instead of saying, "OK", or "No problem", for instance, say "Certainly", "Very well", or "All right". If you're a person who uses fillers when you speak, such as "uh huh", "um", or phrases such as "like" or "you know", train yourself carefully not to use these when you speak on the phone.

4. Train your voice and vocabulary to be positive when phone answering, even on a "down" day. For example, rather than saying, "I don't know", say, "Let me find out about that for you."

Closing the conversation

When you finish your telephone conversation there are some appropriate and courteous statements that should always be made. You should:

- Thank the caller.
- Let the caller know you appreciate his/her business (where appropriate).
- Provide assurance that any promises will be fulfilled.

- Leave the caller with a positive feeling

Some excellent examples of closing statement are:

- *"Thank you for calling. "*
- *"Thanks for your order."*
- *"Feel free to call us anytime."*
- *"I'm glad we were able to help."*
- *"Goodbye and thanks for calling."*
- *"I enjoyed talking with you."*
- *"If you have any additional questions please call me."*
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Tip: Let the caller hang up first. This is simple courtesy, plus it gives the caller a final chance to add something.

Handling Customer Perceptions

We've already given you some hints and tips on how to create a positive perception so here are some "Don'ts" you might want to take into consideration.

It's not always "what we say", but "how we say it" that creates a good or bad customer perception. We need to be aware of the 'throw-away' statements, which may mean little to us but will affect the way the customer perceives your organisation. All of the statements below can produce a poor customer perception.

- *"I'm sorry I didn't call you back. My boss had us in another meeting that lasted all morning."*
- *"I'm sorry it took so long. Now what do you want?"*
- *"I'm sorry you had to wait. Our telephone operators are very slow."*

How to respond to a complaining customer

Listen with understanding. Identify with the customer and "own" the complaint. This defuses anger and demonstrates your concern. Tell the customer something such as, "I am sorry you have been inconvenienced." Tell me what happened so that I can help you." It is vital to show a sincere interest and willingness to help. *The customer's first impression of you is all important in gaining co-operation.*

Many companies have won a substantial amount of business through handling complaints to the client's satisfaction. A complaint is a great opportunity to show how good your customer service can be

No matter what caused the problem, don't blame others or make excuses, take responsibility and the initiative to do whatever you can to solve the problem as quickly as possible.

Paraphrase and record what the customer tells you. Whenever you hear an important point, say, "Let me make sure I understand: you were promised delivery on the 15th and you did not receive the product until the first of the following month. Is that correct?" This tells the customer you are listening to them.

Find out what the customer wants. Do they want a refund, credit, discount or replacement? They're complaining because they have a problem and want it solved as quickly as possible.

Tips for Effective Telephone Use

If you are right-handed, put your phone on the LEFT SIDE of the desk – this enables you to hold the phone and take notes at the same time.

Let people know, by briefing your receptionist/secretary or telephone answering staff when you will RETURN CALLS -- don't leave people hanging; this enables you to set your callers expectations rather than leaving your caller in limbo tied to the phone waiting for you to call them back and if you have to leave a message on an ansaphone say exactly what you need, how to contact you, and the best time to reach you. Be specific with your message. If you want a return call, don't end with "Call me as soon as possible" or "Call me soon" Everyone has "too much to do "and your call just adds to their list of jobs to be actioned.

- If you leave a message with someone ask them to REPEAT your message back to you to make sure they got it right. · Ask if SOMEONE ELSE can help you, rather than leaving a message - you may be taken care of quicker by another person.
- Respect other people's time -- gather together all the information you need to take care of a request BEFORE you return a phone call. If you can't deliver when you say you will, or your telephone is constantly engaged, you have a fundamental customer service failure, which clearly needs fixing as a high priority.

Answering the telephone is an art, not a science. If it was a science we'd all sound the same, it's vital that you and your personality shine through that's what creates the real connection between you and the caller.