# BSBCUS403
# Implement customer service standards

**Release 2**

**Learner guide**

*aspire*
learning resources

# BSBCUS403

# Implement customer service standards

Release 2

**Learner guide**

Aspire Version 1.1

**Aspire**
*learning resources*

Aspire is committed to developing quality resources that meet the needs of our customers. However, occasionally Aspire finds, or is notified of, errors. Please refer to our website at www.aspirelr.com.au to see if there are any updates that may be relevant to you.

Every effort has been made to ensure the information in this book is accurate; however, the author and publisher accept no responsibility for any loss, damage or injury arising from such information.

Except where an information source is acknowledged, the names and details of individuals and organisations used in examples are fictitious and have been devised for learning purposes only. Any similarity to actual people or organisations is unintentional.

All websites referred to in this unit were accessed and deemed appropriate at time of publication.

Aspire Training & Consulting apologises unreservedly for any copyright infringement that may have occurred and invites copyright owners to contact Aspire so any violation may be rectified.

# Contact details

| Participant |
|---|
| Name: |
| Start date: |
| Phone number: |
| Email: |

| Work location |
|---|
| Name: |
| Address: |
| Postal address: |
| Workplace supervisor name: |
| Phone number: |
| Fax: |
| Email: |

| Registered Training Organisation (RTO) |
|---|
| Name: |
| Address: |
| Postal address (if different): |
| Phone number: |
| Fax: |
| RTO contact name: |
| Mobile: |
| Email: |

# Contents

# Before you begin

This learner guide is based on the unit of competency *BSBCUS403 Implement customer service standards*, Release 2. Your trainer or training organisation must give you information about this unit of competency as part of your training program. You can access the unit of competency and assessment requirements at: www.training.gov.au.

## How to work through this learner guide

This learner guide contains a number of features that will assist you in your learning. Your trainer will advise which parts of the learner guide you need to read, and which practice tasks and learning checkpoints you need to complete. The features of this learner guide are detailed in the following table.

| Feature of the learner guide | How you can use each feature |
|---|---|
| Learning content | Read each topic in this learner guide. If you come across content that is confusing, make a note and discuss it with your trainer. Your trainer is in the best position to offer assistance. It is very important that you take on some of the responsibility for the learning you will undertake. |
| Examples and case studies | Examples of completed documents that may be used in a workplace are included in this learner guide. You can use these examples as models to help you complete practice tasks and learning checkpoints. Case studies highlight learning points and provide realistic examples of workplace situations. |
| Practice tasks | Practice tasks give you the opportunity to put your skills and knowledge into action. Your trainer will tell you which practice tasks to complete. |
| Video clips | Where QR codes appear, learners can use smartphones and other devices to access video clips relating to the content. For information about how to download a QR reader app or accessing video on your device, please visit our website: www.aspirelr.com.au/help |
| Summary | Key learning points are provided at the end of each topic. |
| Learning checkpoints | There is a learning checkpoint at the end of each topic. Your trainer will tell you which learning checkpoints to complete. These checkpoints give you an opportunity to check your progress and apply the skills and knowledge you have learnt. |

# Foundation skills

As you complete learning using this guide, you will be developing the foundation skills relevant for this unit. Foundation skills are the language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) skills and the employability skills required for participation in modern workplaces and contemporary life.

The following table outlines specific foundation skills noted for your learning in this learner guide.

| Foundation skill area | Foundation skill description |
| --- | --- |
| Reading | • Interprets and monitors textual information obtained from a range of sources to determine how content may fulfil customer and organisational requirements |
| Writing | • Prepares written reports, up-to-date procedures and other workplace documentation that communicate information clearly and effectively |
| Oral communication | • Clearly articulates systems and standards in a team environment using language suitable to diverse audiences and employs listening and questioning techniques to confirm understanding |
| Navigate the world of work | • Recognises and applies organisational protocols and meets expectations associated with own work |
| Interact with others | • Uses the communication channel, tone and vocabulary that is appropriate to the audience and specific purpose<br>• Collaborates with others to achieve joint outcomes |
| Get the work done | • Plans a range of routine and non-routine tasks and implements actions in accordance with plan to meet desired outcomes<br>• Addresses problems using formal analytical thinking techniques to generate possible solutions, seeking input from others as required<br>• Evaluates outcomes of decisions to identify opportunities for improvement |

# Foundation skills

# What do you already know?

Use the following table to identify what you may already know. This may assist you to work out what to focus on in your learning.

| Topic | Key outcome | | Rate your confidence in each section |
|---|---|---|---|
| Topic 1: Contribute to quality customer service standards | 1A | Access, interpret, apply and monitor customer service standards | ❑ Confident<br>❑ Basic understanding<br>❑ Not confident |
| | 1B | Contribute to the development, refinement and improvement of customer service standards, policies and processes | ❑ Confident<br>❑ Basic understanding<br>❑ Not confident |
| Topic 2: Implement customer service systems | 2A | Encourage personnel to consistently implement customer service systems | ❑ Confident<br>❑ Basic understanding<br>❑ Not confident |
| | 2B | Review customer feedback in consultation with others, identify problems and make adjustments | ❑ Confident<br>❑ Basic understanding<br>❑ Not confident |
| | 2C | Communicate adjustments to service delivery to all involved, within time frames | ❑ Confident<br>❑ Basic understanding<br>❑ Not confident |
| | 2D | Coordinate and manage delivery of services and products to ensure they meet quality standards | ❑ Confident<br>❑ Basic understanding<br>❑ Not confident |
| Topic 3: Implement team customer service standards | 3A | Plan and implement team and work activities, and identify resources to meet customer needs and expectations | ❑ Confident<br>❑ Basic understanding<br>❑ Not confident |

# Topic 1
# Contribute to quality customer service standards

Quality customer service is the key to success for any organisation. Customers expect fast, friendly and quality service. If customers are happy, they remain loyal to the organisation and may bring new customers.

There are specific customer service tools that organisations use to provide quality customer service. These include customer service charters, quality management systems and standards.

Managers, team leaders and supervisors who work in customer service have specific responsibilities to access, interpret, apply, monitor, develop, refine and improve customer service standards, policies and processes, to ensure current service levels match customer needs.

In this topic you will learn how to:

1A    Access, interpret, apply and monitor customer service standards

1B    Contribute to the development, refinement and improvement of customer service standards, policies and processes

# 1A | Access, interpret, apply and monitor customer service standards

Customer service standards are established by organisations to provide procedures and guidelines for employees when dealing with customers. The image presented to customers, the ways employees communicate and treat customers, and their knowledge of products, services and customers' needs all have an enormous effect on the success of an organisation.

As a manager, team leader or supervisor, you must be able to access, interpret, apply and monitor customer service standards in the workplace according to organisational standards, policies and procedures. This allows you to plan and prepare customer service strategies and accurately communicate these to your team members.

## Identify customers

Customer service extends beyond those people who purchase your products and services. From a management viewpoint, customers may represent a variety of people.

Customers may be new, existing or previous clients of your organisation. Their requests for goods or services may be routine or special, depending on the nature of your business and the customers' specific needs.

During your work, you are likely to meet people with different interests, backgrounds, cultures and experiences. You may deal with customers who do not speak English very well. Some customers may be angry, aggressive or annoyed. Some may have a disability.

Here is a list of customer types that organisations may encounter.

**Internal customers**

Internal customers are those from within the organisation who depend on you and your team to provide customer service, such as other managers and colleagues from other teams.

**External customers**

External customers are people who purchase and consume the products and services of the organisation. This is most commonly consumers, although other businesses can also represent your external customers.

**Third parties**

Third parties are those such as suppliers, creditors and government agencies who do not necessarily purchase your products or services, but with whom the organisation has a business relationship.

**General public**

Individual members of the public may come into contact with your organisation, its products and services, and/or its communications with the public. These people may not necessarily purchase but there is a relationship between them and the organisation; for example, people making an inquiry.

**Culturally diverse**

Customers may come from a range of social, cultural or ethnic backgrounds that affect how they communicate. You should learn to understand and practise intercultural communication, which focuses on understanding language expressions, expressions of courtesy, body language, social behaviour, speech patterns and contact between men and women who are different according to their cultural backgrounds.

**Specific needs**

Some customers may have a disability or impairment, physical or mental. They may require extra assistance to access your organisation, communicate their needs or understand your procedures. You should make every effort to accommodate customers with disabilities by anticipating their needs, providing reassurance if necessary and maintaining your professional service. Depending on the type of industry you work in, you and your team members may need training on how to deal with customers who are unwell, drug-affected or emotionally distressed.

# Definition of customer service

Customer service involves assisting customers in a variety of ways by providing them with information, support, products or services that meet their needs and address their concerns or issues.

Providing customers with reliable and satisfactory services is a primary focus of most organisations and is central to an organisation's growth. Without their customers' business, organisations could not continue to function.

Here are the elements of customer service.

**Behaviours**

Customer service encompasses a range of specific behaviours, such as listening actively, communicating and explaining clearly, questioning and summarising information, showing empathy and being cheerful and positive. It also includes the extent to which the organisation has efficient and flexible ordering, delivery and payment processes, provides high-quality products and services to meet the needs of customers, and has policies and procedures in place to ensure service is delivered to customers consistently and at the desired standard.

**Quality**

High-quality customer service occurs when an organisation treats its customers with respect, provides honest information, advises on appropriate goods and services to meet their needs, offers quality products and services, and handles complaints fairly, promptly and effectively. By delivering excellent customer service, an organisation builds an ongoing relationship with its customers, which, in the highly competitive world of business, can mean the difference between success and failure.

**Effectiveness**

Customer service is difficult to measure. It is difficult to calculate the effects of a smile or a friendly voice on the telephone. In many situations, people are only aware of customer service when it has fallen down or caused problems for the customer. But customer service is often the only factor that makes people choose one organisation over another. Good customer service is at the core of an organisation's development and a business can only expand in relation to the number of customers it manages to attract and to retain.

**Efficiency**

Organisations now recognise that to meet customer expectations, they must be prepared to monitor their customers' needs closely and to offer more incentives for them to remain loyal. With business now governed by increasingly high-level technology, customers expect their needs to be met promptly. Goods are now delivered from one side of the country to the other overnight and information is available at the touch of a button. Prompt and efficient service is crucial to maintaining a high customer base.

# Provide quality customer service

Your organisation's customer service model should encompass the standards, policies, procedures and protocols that function together to provide high-quality customer service.

In today's highly competitive marketplace, customers usually have a choice of several providers for a similar product or service. One of the ways that customers choose which organisation they will give their business to is the type of service they receive. People prefer to deal with a company or store where they are treated well.

For this reason, the goal of many businesses is to provide their clients with a customer service experience superior to that offered by their competitors.

Here are the characteristics of quality customer service.

**Employees**

Your organisation may have a pre-employment screening and recruitment process in place to ensure it hires people who are friendly, helpful, caring, responsible and ethical. Most customer service representatives should have prior experience dealing directly with customers by phone, written or electronic communications. Those who are new to the industry but have desirable personality traits should be trained by experienced personnel.

To provide quality customer service, it is essential that all team members have good communication skills, thorough knowledge of the organisation's products and services, and a diplomatic, solutions-based approach to resolving customer complaints. Customer service is not just the responsibility of those at the front line of the organisation. Strong support from employees across the entire organisation ensures that an excellent level of customer service can be maintained.

**Training**

All team members who deal with customers, whether they are officially in the customer service team or not, should be trained to understand the organisation's policies, procedures and standards for dealing with customers, and the communication methods they are expected to use. Providing quality customer service could mean training team members to use phone call scripts, follow written protocols for different levels of customer concerns or understand a chain of command to deal with defective products.

Organisational protocols relating to customer service must be understood and recognised by all team members so they know what to say to customers with specific inquiries or concerns, who to contact to provide a solution and what kinds of solution can be offered to satisfy the customer.

**Best practice**

Quality customer service can be achieved when an organisation makes it a consistent, daily priority to ensure that customers have a positive experience. This means that customer service efforts are not limited to the customer service department, but the commitment to quality service is championed by every department. Product or service quality assurance, as well as customer service standards and best practices, should be emphasised in all marketing campaigns.

Quality service means the customer receives a personalised service, accurate information and solutions appropriate to their needs. This also gives customer service team members a much easier time in maintaining positive customer relations.

# Customer service models

A customer service model demonstrates how an organisation manages the various elements of customer service. It is generally presented as a flow chart or similar representation.

Customer service models often focus on strategies to increase customer satisfaction while reducing costs and conflict. Implementing an organisational model that focuses on service improvement is essential for achieving wider organisational goals and objectives.

Successful customer service models require the continual updating of standards, policies and procedures to meet customers' needs.

These models take many forms and can be represented in a variety of ways. Here is an example of a customer service model.



# Customer service documentation

Customer service standards, policies and processes allow you to set benchmarks that your team members must meet. For example, if you have a standard for serving customers that involves being courteous or completing transactions within a certain time, you can provide a positive experience to your customers, suppliers and distributors in their dealings with you. Customers who have a positive experience are more likely to become repeat customers and are less likely to complain about your organisation.

Having formalised customer service processes in place can save you time and money by increasing efficiency. Your team members will be more productive and efficient if there is a set of processes to follow and, as a manager, you can spend less time overseeing the day-to-day running of the business. Processes can also improve the consistency of product and service delivery by your team.

Customer service standards, policies and processes must be:

- documented; for example, in a customer service charter or standard operating procedures
- grounded in the vision and strategy of your organisation
- clear about general customer service procedures, as well as role-specific procedures
- part of a staff training program and made available in a user-friendly format, such as the intranet
- practised and demonstrated by management so that team members will follow their lead
- flexible and open to improvement
- regularly discussed, reviewed and updated, especially due to legislative or compliance changes.

# Customer service standards

Customer service standards dictate the ways that customers are to be treated and the best practices to be observed by customer service staff. Having customer service standards in place and training team members on your directives can help encourage repeat business and improve the overall operation of your organisation.

Here are the areas that customer service standards should cover.

**Customer service standards**



**Service expectations**

Establish what type of experience you want your customers to have and set the parameters for your customer service standards. Assess every part of your customer service model from the customer's perspective.

Look at wait times, processing and delivery times, customer accessibility, business hours, pricing and other policies. Consider the ability of your team members to fill orders and meet deadlines in a timely manner and to handle customer feedback in a knowledgeable and helpful way.



**Policies and procedures**

For your team members to be effective in delivering exceptional customer service, they must have solid working knowledge of your organisation's policies, procedures and protocols for customer interaction.

You may need to develop training programs or institute coaching, mentoring or job shadowing to develop solid working knowledge of best practices in customer service.

You may also conduct customer service performance reviews and solicit feedback from customers to improve service provision.

### Communication

How you and your team members communicate with customers should be subject to meeting the organisation's customer service standards. This includes in-person interaction as well as telephone, email and written exchanges.

Develop acceptable standards for returning calls, waiting time on hold and turnaround times for electronic communication responses. Carefully develop communication channels, such as newsletters or websites, to be user-friendly and customer-focused.

### Employee empowerment

Giving your team members opportunities to use their best judgment in providing quality customer service is invaluable. While you want to maintain consistency in your customer service standards, team members should be given the flexibility to depart from the rules in some circumstances.

Be specific with your team members about how they can handle customer inquiries in ways that benefit the organisation and maintain good customer relations.
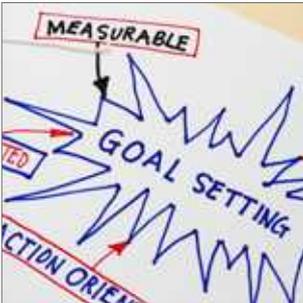
### Goals and measurement

Successful customer service standards should have corresponding goals and measurements to ensure effectiveness. You should continually monitor how well your team members are meeting established standards and take necessary action to correct any departure from your objectives. Regularly survey employees and customers about customer service experiences and adjust your standards as necessary.

## Customer service policies and procedures

To be able to accurately assess what customers expect from your organisation and its products or services, you need to have thorough knowledge of the customer service policies and procedures your organisation has in place for satisfying customers.

Organisations formalise customer service policies and procedures to ensure internal and external customers are treated consistently and to a desired result. Team members rely on policies and procedures for guidance on how to interact with customers; how to deal with unhappy customers or complaints efficiently; and how to deliver customer service in a manner consistent with organisational objectives.

Customer service policies and procedures are usually documented and stored in a manual and/or on an organisation's intranet.

Here is more about customer service policies and procedures.

Policies and procedures relate to the following issues:

- How to greet or approach a customer
- Method of responding to customer inquiries
- Order processing
- Terms of payment and payment options
- Refunds, returns and exchanges policy
- Method for handling customer complaints
- Dress code for staff
- Work health and safety considerations
- Speed of service required
- Sales methods and techniques
- Delivery options and availability
- Pricing and discounting policy
- Credit terms and application process
- Guarantees and warranties applicable
- Appearance of store or workplace
- Continuous improvement cycle

# Organisational protocols

It is important to understand the difference between customer service models, standards and protocols. The customer service model is the structure explaining how an organisation's customer service system functions at various stages. Customer service standards are the guidelines that set and measure an organisation's desired level of quality in customer service.

Organisational protocols are the official processes or system of rules that explain the correct conduct and procedures to be followed in the workplace. Organisational protocols are usually contained within a series of codes and are underpinned by relevant legislation or regulations.

You and your team members must recognise and apply organisational protocols in order to meet expectations associated with your individual roles.

Organisational protocols underpinned by legislation may relate to:

- ethical behaviour
- harassment or discrimination in the workplace
- customer privacy and confidentiality
- handling of situations of risk and crisis
- sales and selling techniques
- reporting and record-keeping requirements.

# Role of the team leader

Customer service managers, team leaders and supervisors have specific responsibilities to assess current service levels, match them to customer needs and provide advice to their team members about opportunities to improve customer service delivery.

Compliance is the act of being in alignment with organisational guidelines, regulations and legislation. As a manager, you must ensure that you comply with customer service systems and standards in order to role model the values, attitudes and behaviours desired in your team members in providing quality customer service.

Here is more about roles and responsibilities of customer service managers.

| Role and responsibilities of customer service managers |
| --- |
| • Identify and understand who the organisation's customers are. |
| • Analyse customer service needs. |
| • Have thorough understanding of products and services. |
| • Be familiar with the customer service charter, standards and best practice. |
| • Resolve customer complaints. |
| • Coach, mentor and train team members in customer service skills. |
| • Review customer satisfaction. |

# Access customer service standards

As a manager, you should be familiar with your organisation's customer service standards as a framework for developing and maintaining an acceptable level of customer service.

Customer service standards, incorporating protocols, policies and procedures, may be documented and stored in a paper-based manual, electronic file or an organisation's intranet. You should be familiar with the methods and technology your organisation uses to collect and distribute its customer service standards to ensure you can accurately direct your team members to the information. For example, each customer service officer should have a copy of the customer service charter handy for quick reference when needed.

# Interpret customer service standards

It is important that your team members are involved in the setting of standards to be applied in their particular work area. This will ensure they know what the standards are and how to apply them.

Managers should regularly review the customer service standards that have been set and determine where improvements could be made.

Assist your team members to interpret customer service by:

- being a role model in terms of behaviour, attitude and compliance with standards and systems
- recognising and applying organisational protocols
- encouraging fair and ethical practices in customer service
- encouraging non-discriminatory work practices
- providing strategies for achieving both work and personal goals
- providing feedback and encouragement to team members in applying the standards.

# Apply customer service standards

Customer service standards, protocols and procedures should be applied to all areas that have customers, whether they are internal or external. Team members working within public contact areas and, where applicable, internal service delivery areas should implement strategies that demonstrate the organisation's customer service standards and organisational protocols.

Here are the areas in which customer service standards commonly apply.

**Telephone standards**

Customer service standards apply to team members who are responsible for providing customer service via the telephone. For example, standards include:

- correctly operating telephone system, putting customers on hold and transferring calls
- promptly answering all phone calls within a certain number of rings
- using a friendly tone on the phone
- developing a formal, written, customer-friendly telephone greeting
- identifying the customer by using the caller's name
- completing any follow-up action as promised.

**Counter standards**

Customer service standards apply to team members who are responsible for providing customer service over the counter. For example, standards include:

- providing a customer-focused public contact area
- serving customers as soon as possible and within specified response times
- enduring personal hygiene and dress are appropriate and professional
- smiling, making eye contact and listening to the customer
- conducting the transaction in a professional manner
- thanking the customer for their time.

**Handling standards**

Customer service standards apply to team members who are responsible for handling customer complaints. For example, standards include:

- ensuring a written complaint-handling policy is in place
- responding to complaints quickly and treating each one courteously
- providing relevant and simple information to customers about the complaint process
- providing adequate resources to team members for complaint handling, including training and support
- ensuring appropriate and comprehensive recording of complaints and outcomes
- linking complaint-handling procedures to organisational improvement mechanisms.

# Customer service charters

An effective strategy to improve the overall level of customer service in your organisation is to implement a customer service charter that models best practice in customer service.

A customer service charter lists an organisation's service standards, attitudes and systems that must be in place to guide the customer service effort and the actions of staff. There may be separate service charters for internal and external customers.

Here are some commonly used elements of a customer service charter.

**Purpose**

The purpose section of the customer service charter is a statement of the organisation's underlying principles towards customers and the reasons that it needs a charter in place. Generally, the purpose of the charter is to specify and clearly state the customer service standards expected by the organisation and its employees, to effectively act as a service promise to customers.

**Target market**

The customer service charter should identify the organisation's target customers or market segments. It is important to identify exactly who the customers of an organisation are, before attempting to understand their customer service needs and devising strategies to meet them. It is not required to go into too much detail in the customer service charter about who the organisation's customers are; a general outline of who the organisation believes are its target customers will suffice.

**Customer communication**

The customer service charter must describe the communication principles it follows with regard to communicating with customers about changes to operations or issues that will affect the customer. For example, communication with customers may be required when prices rise, stores/locations close, policies change, the business moves premises, or customer service policies, procedures or standards change.

**Customer complaints**

The customer service charter should include its approach to providing customers with the opportunity to raise complaints and provide other feedback. This includes the organisation's general philosophy in this area; for example, how open it is to feedback and complaints, as well as the specific steps it has in place for customers to contact it.

**Privacy and security**

The customer service charter should describe how an organisation protects the privacy and security of its customers. These need to be outlined clearly to provide customers with a feeling of security by ensuring staff know the restrictions governing personal information.

# Apply standards and policies to a customer service charter

A customer service charter should also provide actions to follow based on the customer service standards and policies.

Here are examples of specific customer service policies that a charter should address.

**Prompt customer service**

Customer service policies outline the specific standards expected by the organisation in serving customers and responding to their inquiries.

For example:

- Customers who enter our store must be approached for service within 60 seconds of entry.
- All in-bound telephone calls must be answered within 15 seconds and all customer queries handled within seven minutes.
- Email inquiries from customers must be forwarded to the relevant person within the organisation and answered within two business days.

**Order processing and delivery times**

The ordering process and delivery standard outlines the standards set for the time frame within which customer orders must be processed. This defines the total time allowable between the time the customer places an order until the time the customer receives the product or service.

For example:

- All customer orders must be delivered within 10 business days from the time the order was placed.

**Customer accessibility**

Customer accessibility standards outline the ways that customers can contact the organisation and during what hours.

For example, the organisation may state that it can receive queries from customers via:

- its internet homepage
- an email address for customer inquiries
- a business phone number (with hours of operation)
- a fax number (with hours of operation)
- a postal address or PO box.

| |
|---|
| **Business hours** |
| Customer service policies should outline the hours when the organisation is open for business, as well as the hours when customers can contact it. |
| **Separation of responsibility between departments** |
| Outline which person, team or department is responsible for which areas of customer service. This is particularly important for larger organisations where collaboration between people or departments is required when serving customers. |
| For example, the charter could state which person, team or department is responsible for: |
| • receiving customer inquiries<br>• serving customers in the ordering process<br>• taking customer orders<br>• processing customer orders<br>• resolving customer complaints and disputes. |
| **Pricing policy** |
| The pricing policy outlines the organisation's overall pricing policy. This is usually done broadly in terms of where the business prices itself in the market (high-end versus low-end) and may include a commitment to guarantee the lowest cost, or to match or beat competitors' offerings. |
| **Refunds, returns and exchanges policy** |
| The refunds, returns and exchanges policy outlines the circumstances under which the organisation allows customers to return or exchange items and under what conditions refunds are issued. This needs to be clear and specify things like the time frame in which products can be returned, any purchase amount limits that apply, staff/manager approval required and presentation of receipt conditions. |
| **Guarantees and warranties in effect** |
| A guarantees and warranties policy outlines the guarantees and warranties that the organisation provides on its products and services. These need to be specific and clear to meet legal guidelines and to provide the customer with an accurate view of any conditions or restrictions that may apply in order to prevent misunderstandings later on. |

# Customer service charter: external customers

Here is a section of a customer service charter that describes the behaviours expected of staff towards their external customers.

| Purpose/ key element | How will we do this? | What will we do internally? | What does the sales department need to do? |
|---|---|---|---|
| Provide professional, courteous service | Providing professional, courteous service means:<br>• identifying ourselves when we communicate with customers<br>• listening to and clarifying customer needs<br>• keeping the customer informed on the progress of their inquiry. | We will:<br>• include contact details on all written correspondence<br>• introduce ourselves with first and last name and provide a business card for follow-up<br>• actively listen to the customer, check understanding of their needs, take notes and confirm the action to be taken<br>• be wary of marking assumptions about customer identity, needs, concerns or expectations<br>• ensure we keep our promises to customers regarding feedback, progress and outcomes. | Sales team members will:<br>• ensure that our samples are complete and in good condition<br>• ensure our communications are courteous, consistent and professional<br>• provide accurate and detailed information<br>• act on our reminder systems immediately. |

## Customer service charter: internal customers

Here is a section of a customer service charter that discusses how staff should communicate and behave towards each other within the organisation.

| Key element | Shared behaviours | How do we demonstrate the shared behaviours? |
|---|---|---|
| Communication | To communicate effectively, we will:<br>• listen carefully to each other<br>• communicate clearly the needs and expectations of work provided<br>• provide open and honest two-way communication between staff<br>• give and receive feedback. | We will:<br>• make time to listen<br>• keep each other informed with regular progress reports on work we are involved with<br>• communicate in a supportive and constructive way<br>• communicate clearly, consistently and not judgmentally<br>• provide opportunities for feedback. |

*... continued*

| Key element | Shared behaviours | How do we demonstrate the shared behaviours? |
|---|---|---|
| Behaviour | To behave appropriately, we will:<br>• behave with integrity and in an ethical manner<br>• take pride in what we do<br>• acknowledge problems and errors, correct and learn from them. | We will:<br>• always model the desired behaviours as an example to others<br>• keep in mind the question: is it the right thing to do for the right reason?<br>• act promptly and do what we say we will do<br>• strive to do our best in every interaction<br>• take ownership of problems and complaints<br>• act quickly to solve problems. |

# Monitor customer service standards

Maintaining quality customer service standards requires an organisation to regularly monitor and review its service with regard to compliance and customer satisfaction. This should be an ongoing process of continuous improvement.

Evaluating customer satisfaction with an organisation's service delivery involves assessing the effectiveness of strategies and how well the implementation of any new strategies has been managed, and identifying areas where further improvements can be made.

By continually monitoring the effectiveness of implemented customer service strategies, the organisation can identify which practices to continue and where further improvements are needed.

Here are some strategies to monitor and maintain service standards.

| Strategies to monitor and maintain customer service standards |
|---|
| • Observe staff as they interact with customers.<br>• Review customer satisfaction with service delivery.<br>• Identify and report on changes needed to maintain customer service standards.<br>• Develop recommendations for future directions in customer service.<br>• Maintain systems and records for reporting on and comparing customer satisfaction. |

# Monitor own performance

It is important that you and your team members effectively apply customer service standards, policies, procedures and protocols to meet the expectations associated with your particular work activities and job role. In doing this, you need to monitor your own performance and encourage your team members to do the same.

Here are some strategies for monitoring your own performance.

| Strategies for monitoring own performance |
|---|
| • Identify any skills or knowledge gaps and seek internal or external learning opportunities. |
| • Read and understand your role and responsibilities statement. |
| • Monitor and review your strengths and weaknesses. |
| • Attend professional development and networking activities. |
| • Seek the advice of a manager, coach or mentor. |
| • Shadow a more experienced colleague to learn by demonstration. |
| • Acquire self-management skills. |

## Example: access, interpret, apply and monitor customer service standards

Sonia is the new customer service manager at a health insurance fund. It is her responsibility to organise and control the operations of the call centre and front counter, review customer service standards and maintain sound customer relations. Sonia has been with the health insurance fund for three weeks and notices that not only do her team members not wear a uniform, they lack professional presentation altogether: team members who work at the front counter are often wearing jeans and shirts without collars.

Sonia accesses the company intranet and discovers a customer service charter that was developed three years ago, just before the company experienced a peak growth period. The charter has not been updated since its inception. She reads through the charter and finds customer service standards relating to a dress code. It states that all customer service team members must wear a black collared shirt displaying the company's logo at all times. The uniform is subsidised by the company. However, former managers decided to let this lapse as many staff found the uniform unappealing.

Sonia arranges a team meeting to discuss the dress code. Most of the team members have been recruited in the last 12 months and have not been made aware of the company's dress standards. Sonia explains to the team that a uniform will not only help customers know who to approach, but also give team members a sense of unity, have a positive impact on customer behaviour and promote equality within the organisation.

Over the next month, Sonia works with her team to design, order and implement a compulsory corporate uniform for the customer service team with the goal of improving the organisation's image and customer perceptions. Sonia monitors the effectiveness of the new dress standard by including a question about it in the organisation's customer satisfaction surveys.

v1660

## Practice task 1

Prepare and conduct an interview with a customer service manager. Identify how the manager accesses, interprets, applies and monitors customer service standards in their workplace. Identify how the manager ensures that organisational standards, policies and procedures are adhered to. Summarise your findings.

## 1B | Contribute to the development, refinement and improvement of customer service standards, policies and processes

Customer service standards formalise the level of customer service you aim to provide and what practical things you must do to achieve this. The standards set a target for organisations to meet customer needs through the use of its people, systems and technology.

Establishing quality customer service standards in your organisation requires commitment from yourself and your team members to plan, develop, implement and sustain the standards. It also involves training and feedback.

An important aspect of your role is to make contributions to your organisation's customer service operations to better meet the needs of the organisation and its customers.

## Contribute to developing the customer service model

The customer service model, plan or program within your organisation should be regularly monitored and reviewed to ensure it continues to meet customer needs and remains in line with customer service trends and customer expectations.

The customer service standards, policies and processes that make up an organisation's customer service model are generally developed as an exercise involving all staff, and further refined by a specific team responsible for development and implementation.

Here are some ways that you can contribute to a customer service plan.

**Gather feedback**

**Gather feedback to gain customer insight**

Interview customers to gain better understanding of their experiences with your organisation and with your competitors. Ask customers to describe their expectations for your type of business and try to discover any unmet needs.

Use a variety of survey methods to gain customer insight, including in-person interviews, online surveys, focus groups and customer satisfaction forms.

**Analyse operations**

**Analyse current operations**

Create a thorough analysis of your current operations, focusing on the customer service element. Draw process flow charts and service-area diagrams to visualise the ways your team members interact with customers and with each other. Write a process narrative describing an average customer experience from your customers' and team members' points of view.

Ask fellow team leaders, managers or other colleagues to assist you by providing details of their own experiences in frontline management.

**Monitor performance**

**Monitor customer service performance**

Use the feedback gathered from customers and team members to create a table listing the most important customer service factors discovered and rate your organisation's performance in each area.

Use this chart to identify which areas of customer service your organisation excels at and which areas may need improvement or where adjustments need to be made.

**Strategise**

**Strategise for customer service improvement**

Create a list of customer service strategies that will bring your operations into line with customers' expectations and unmet needs. Work on one or two issues at a time, focusing on your identified weaknesses first. Consult your frontline team members to find out exactly what they need to accomplish to perform their jobs more effectively.

Possible strategies for customer service improvement include redesigning:

- processes
- physical spaces
- methods of service delivery
- employee incentive programs
- training programs.

**Implement strategies**

**Implement strategies**

Seek approval to implement your chosen strategies and conduct interviews and analysis to measure the outcome. Allow some time to pass, depending on the scope of your changes, before measuring the progress of your improvements.

Gather feedback from the same groups of customers and team members to determine how the changes have affected your customer service performance.

## Refine and improve customer service standards

Use your knowledge of what customers want, observe customer service staff and see how other organisations respond to their customers, in order to provide suggestions and ideas for improving your organisation's standards, policies and processes.

Once you and your team have understood and analysed customer service needs and the quality of service your organisation provides to customers through surveys, complaints and observations, you need to prioritise the areas most in need of improvement.

Consider how the strategies you have identified to resolve particular customer service issues should be introduced to the rest of your organisation. In addition to gaining approval from senior managers for your plans to be implemented, it is vital for your team members to understand what your plans are and how they will be put into action.

Once improvements are endorsed by management, they must be incorporated into customer service models, procedures and charters.

Here are some ways to refine and improve customer service standards.

**Speed of service**

Consider updating traditional service channels within your organisation. New telephone systems, direct extension options, online services or streamlined automated response systems can route customer inquiries to appropriate representatives more efficiently. Adding new service channels such as email, instant messaging or live chat to address customer service issues more efficiently may improve customer service responsiveness.

**Customer concerns**

Develop the skills and knowledge of your customer service team members to ensure they understand the importance of and have the abilities and aptitude to provide your customers with effective resolutions on the first contact, whenever possible. Reinforce positive attributes by providing ongoing opportunities for training and development. Ensure your training efforts are directed towards responding to customers' needs by being sensitive and considerate of their individual differences and circumstances.

**Changes to needs**

Ensure your customer service team members understand that as the initial point of contact between your organisation and your customer, they must be aware of any shifts in general customer needs. Information gained directly from your customers has premium value when refining and improving strategies for addressing similar needs across your customer base. Being sensitive to the changing needs of your customers allows you to improve your service levels, customer responsiveness, loyalty and brand image. For example, more customers may prefer online ordering or access to Facebook or Twitter accounts to express their satisfaction, concerns or ideas for improvement.

## Example: help develop, refine and improve customer service standards

Tomkin is the customer service manager at a busy call centre. He understands that the way his team members answer customer service phone calls determines whether the customer's experience is positive or negative. Since the customer's interaction with the company usually starts before the phone is even answered, Tomkin encourages his team members not to allow the phone to ring for a long time before answering.

For this reason, one of the organisation's customer service standards states that incoming customer service calls must be answered by a representative within the first three rings. If no customer service representatives are available, the customer is greeted by an automated response system that places the customer on hold and provides them with a specific wait time in which they can expect to speak to a representative.

Tomkin receives a number of customer complaints via an online survey relating to lengthy wait times that customers have to endure before speaking to a representative.

Tomkin analyses the existing customer service standards to develop, refine and improve the way that his team sensitively responds to the individual needs of its customers.

He suggests that the organisation implements an automated call-back system where, if no representative is available, the customer can elect to leave their name and number and have a representative return their call as soon as one becomes available. This ensures that customers do not need to wait on hold for long periods of time. Tomkin predicts that the long-term effect of this idea will be to improve customer satisfaction and relations.

## Practice task 2

Read the case study, then answer the questions that follow.

### Case study

Dale is the customer service manager at an online retail business selling surf-brand clothing to individual customers across the country. The organisation's returns and refunds policy states the following: 'All items returned for refund or exchange must be in the original condition with tags attached (unless faulty). Please ensure all returned items are free from marks, stains and rips, as they may not be accepted for return if damaged (unless faulty). Sale items can be returned after 30 days if the product is faulty, under warranty or the incorrect item was received.'

The organisation has received a number of returned items with no tags attached. When the customers are notified that they are not eligible for a refund, some have claimed the items were faulty (for various reasons). Dale's customer service team is having difficulty in responding to these customers, as there is no explanation in the customer service standards differentiating between items that are faulty and those that are not.
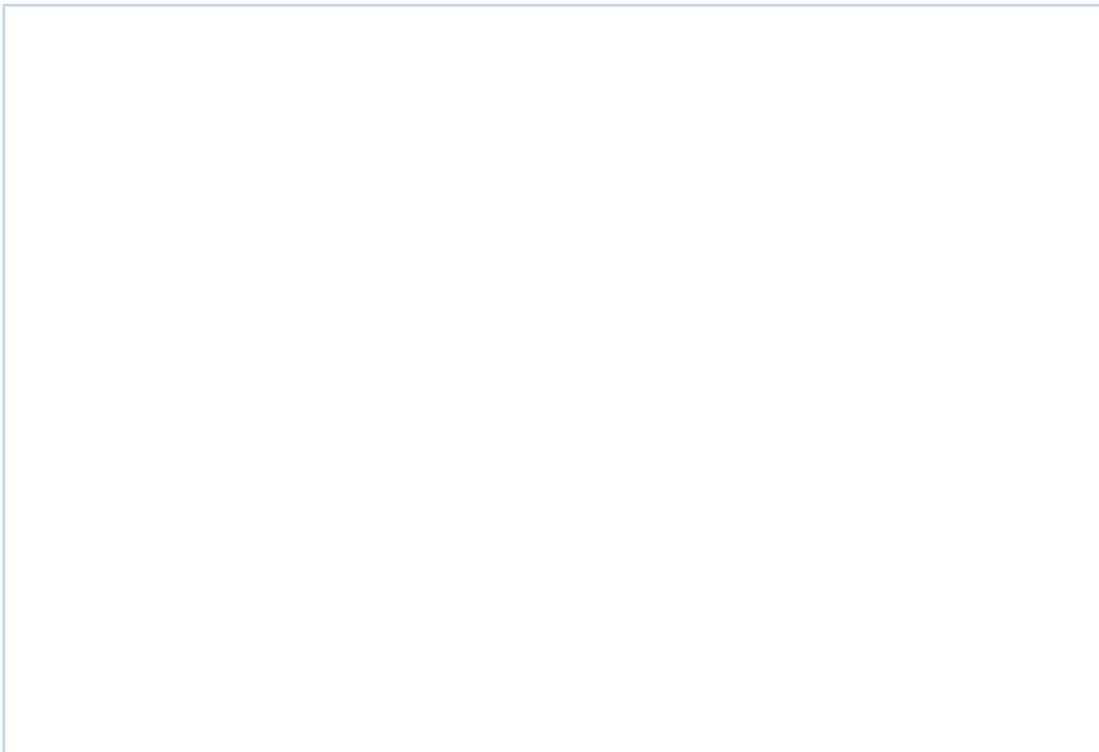
*continued ...*

*... continued*

1. Describe how Dale could contribute to the development of standards, policies and processes within his organisation.

2. Describe how Dale could refine or improve the existing returns and refunds policy.

*... continued*

## Summary

1.  Customer service involves assisting customers in a variety of ways by providing them with information, support, products and/or services that meet their needs and address their concerns or issues.

2.  Organisations formalise customer service standards, policies and procedures in customer service charters to ensure that internal and external customers are treated consistently and with the desired results.

3.  Having customer service standards in place and training team members on your directives can help encourage repeat business and improve the overall operations of your organisation.

4.  As a manager, team leader or supervisor, you should be familiar with your organisation's customer service standards as a framework for developing and maintaining an acceptable level of customer service.

5.  Maintaining quality customer service standards requires an organisation to regularly monitor and review its service with regard to customer satisfaction. This should be an ongoing process of continuous improvement.

6.  You can contribute to developing and improving the customer service plan by using your knowledge of what customers want, observing customer service staff, seeing how other organisations respond to their customers and then providing suggestions and ideas for improvement.

7.  Once you and your team have understood and analysed customer service needs and the quality of service your organisation provides to customers, you need to prioritise the areas most in need of improvement.

## Learning checkpoint 1
## Contribute to quality customer service standards

This learning checkpoint allows you to review your skills and knowledge in contributing to quality customer service standards.

### Part A

1.  Explain what is meant by a customer service model.

2.  Explain the importance of demonstrating compliance with customer service systems and standards.

3.  Use at least five examples to describe communication procedures and standards that contribute to quality customer service.

4.  Explain how customer service standards can improve customer relationships.

5. Explain what is meant by organisational protocols and provide two examples.

6. Describe three ways that customer service standards could be documented, stored and accessed.

7. Describe two ways that customer service managers could assist team members to interpret customer service standards.

## Part B

Read the case study below, then answer the questions that follow.

**Case study**

Carmel is the customer service manager at a new department store offering a wide range of consumer goods in different product categories. Carmel manages a team of 20 customer service representatives who rotate working on the store floor and in the customer telephone inquiries office. All of Carmel's team members have previous experience working in customer service. The department store is privately owned and the owner has asked Carmel to contribute to the development and application of customer service standards, policies and processes, as part of an operational management committee. The owner has also asked Carmel to come up with a strategy for monitoring the new customer service standards that will identify how these standards can be refined and improved in the future.

1.  Describe one way that Carmel could contribute to the development of customer service standards, policies and processes.

2.  Describe two customer service standards that are applicable to Carmel's workplace and would assist her to meet the expectations associated with her role.

3.  Describe how Carmel could monitor and maintain the new customer service standards.

4.  Describe two customer service standards that Carmel might need to refine or improve in the future.

# Topic 2
# Implement customer service systems

Customer service systems are the strategies through which an organisation implements its customer service model, including the standards, policies, processes, methods and technologies used to deliver a quality service that satisfies the needs and expectations of customers.

Successful customer service systems depend on excellent supervision and leadership. They should include strategy planning, resource allocation, evaluation and consultation with team members.

In this topic you will learn how to:

2A    Encourage personnel to consistently implement customer service systems

2B    Review customer feedback in consultation with others, identify problems and make adjustments

2C    Communicate adjustments to service delivery to all involved, within time frames

2D    Coordinate and manage delivery of services and products to ensure they meet quality standards

## 2A | Encourage personnel to consistently implement customer service systems

It is your role to encourage and train your team members to feel confident and supported in their consistent application of the various systems that facilitate your quality customer service model.

The success of a customer service system requires the commitment of all those involved in implementing it, which is effectively everyone in the organisation.

### Customer service systems

Developing and implementing customer service systems involves planning how your organisation will meet the needs of its customers through a range of strategies and procedures. Your customer service systems should differentiate your organisation from your competitors by making the customer experience more efficient, accessible and engaging.

The consistent application of successful customer service systems can provide your organisation with a reputation for service excellence and help it to become an employer of choice for customer service professionals.

Here are some examples of customer service systems.

**Training**

**Train your customer service team**

Incorporating a customer service training program within your organisation allows your team members to become confident in understanding standards, policies and procedures, as well as in implementing customer service systems and strategies. Staff training allows you to motivate and engage your team members to deliver quality customer service, build meaningful workplace relationships and promote a positive organisational culture.

**Website**

**Create a customer-centric website**

A customer-centric website design involves creating an organisational website that meets the needs and preferences of your existing and potential customers. Creating a website that is user-friendly, as well as providing all the information necessary to make a buying decision, improves customer accessibility and satisfaction. Your organisation's website should be easy to use and navigate, contain organised information and facilitate the process of customer complaint resolution; for example, through the provision of a frequently asked questions feature.

**Telephone system**

### Install a cost-effective telephone system

Customer service telephone systems should increase flexibility, mobility and productivity in service delivery, require little technical ability to use, and be cost effective for your organisation. You could consider installing Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) technology, which refers to a series of transmission capabilities that allow customers to communicate with your organisation over the internet. Not only does VoIP save costs spent on traditional phone bills, it enables team members to multi-task without interruption by allowing users to attach documents, share data via videoconferencing and conduct virtual meetings.

**Help desk**

### Provide help desks for internal and external customers

A help desk is a department inside an organisation that is responsible for answering the technical questions of its users or responding to questions from its customers. Questions and responses can be transferred using email, telephone, websites or online chat. You should consider incorporating a help desk for the use of employees within your organisation to raise and resolve their technical issues promptly and with little effort. You could also provide a help desk to your customers if it would be useful for the type of products and services you offer.

**Complaints system**

### Implement a complaint-handling system

When customers complain, an opportunity arises for your organisation to identify issues with and improve your service delivery. You should develop and implement a complaint-handling system with specific instructions and processes to be followed, including the accurate recording of the complaint. A complaint-handling system may include paper-based complaint forms, online complaints submission, comments sections in customer satisfaction surveys, a complaints telephone hotline or designated department or the option to email complaints to a specific email address.

**Client loyalty program**

### Establish a client loyalty program

Client loyalty programs are implemented by many organisations to attract new clients, retain existing clients and build long-term business partnerships. Establishing a client loyalty program within your organisation differentiates you from your competitors and provides you with new opportunities to communicate with customers regarding other products and services you provide. Client loyalty systems may include financial incentives, special offers, premium services or points programs.

**Feedback system**

### Implement a customer feedback system

There are several formal and informal information sources that organisations can implement to access data on customer service needs in order to provide quality customer service, such as a website form for comments, a feedback form inserted with products or a question put to customers from staff after a purchase to seek a comment on their opinion of the service. Implement a customer feedback system that collects reliable and useful data that helps your team to identify service delivery areas in need of improvement and make adjustments as necessary.

**CRM**

### Utilise customer relationship management (CRM) systems

Customer relationship management (CRM) is an approach to managing your organisation's interactions with existing and potential customers. It involves using technology to organise, automate and synchronise sales, marketing, customer service and technical support. As well as improving the service you provide to customers, CRM can reduce costs, wastage and customer complaints by streamlining customer service processes to make the experience efficient and engaging. CRM also reduces staff stress, as it opens lines of communication with customers and simplifies market research efforts.

**Promotion**

### Promote customer service to customers

It is not just the quality of your products and services that keeps customers coming back to your organisation with their business. Promoting your organisation's commitment to quality customer service and fulfilling promises by doing what you say you will do are effective marketing strategies and improve the organisation's service delivery reputation. Use strategies such as newsletters, media releases and community work.

## Identify relevant personnel

The designated individuals and groups to whom you must promote your customer service systems will vary depending on the nature and size of your organisation. Customer service systems must be promoted to all people whose support and input is required to implement them.

Here is a list of the types of personnel required to implement customer service systems.

### Customer service representatives

For any customer service system to be effective, regardless of the type of organisation, it must have the support of the customer service representatives and teams who are ultimately responsible for delivering the service to customers. These are the frontline people who shape customers' opinions on the organisation's customer service performance. As such, they have unique insights into customer service based on their interactions with customers that could prove valuable in formulating customer service systems and strategies.

### Customer service management

The line management of the customer service team who are responsible for managing customer representatives must be encouraged to implement customer service systems. Their commitment and acceptance of the systems directly influence how customer service representatives view and accept any proposed changes. Customer service managers, team leaders and supervisors also have the expertise to advise on the feasibility of any proposed systems or improvements.

### Senior management/your supervisor

Your organisation's senior management, including your supervisor, may need to authorise or approve any customer service systems you want to implement. Senior management can determine how a system will fit within the organisation's operations and contribute towards achieving wider organisational goals.

### Other departments, divisions or colleagues

You may need to encourage other departments, divisions or work colleagues to support the implementation of customer service systems. The feasibility of customer service systems may depend on the ability of other departments to provide services that complement the objectives of the customer service team. Gaining organisational support allows you to draw on the resources and expertise of people outside the customer service department and gain feedback about how the systems benefit or detract from other organisational processes.

### Organisational committees

Your organisation may have various committees in place that are made up of work colleagues from a variety of departments. Examples include work health and safety (WHS) committees, fundraising committees and social committees. Committee members must be encouraged to implement customer service systems and provide feedback, input and reviews, as the systems relate to committee activities.

### Suppliers

You may need to encourage your suppliers to incorporate customer service systems into their practices when interacting with your organisation. Any customer service systems that require alterations to supply need to be discussed and arranged with suppliers prior to implementing the system, in order to assess viability. An example is where your organisation seeks to alter ordering systems for customers, which usually requires the support of suppliers.

| **External organisations** |
| --- |
| If your organisation relies on third-party organisations to assist in providing products or services to customers, they must also be notified and encouraged to implement your customer service systems when interacting with your business. Examples include trade unions, industry bodies, government departments and advisory boards. |

# Encourage personnel to implement systems

There are a range of strategies that managers can use to encourage personnel to implement customer service systems, such as role modelling, training sessions, providing information at team meetings and arranging specific discussion sessions to explain each system and the skills and knowledge needed to carry out the activities successfully.

Team members may have difficulty meeting the requirements of customer service systems or quality service standards due to inexperience or misunderstanding of what is required of them. When implementing your organisation's customer service systems, it is your responsibility to provide guidance through coaching and mentoring.

Here are some coaching and mentoring tips.

**Coaching**

A coach is someone who provides team members with the assistance required in performing the duties required by their role. A coach may be a supervisor or manager who has a full understanding of the organisation's customer service systems and strategies, and is able to provide support for staff based on their technical expertise and background knowledge. You could act as a coach for members of your customer service team or engage other members of your organisation who have expertise in a particular area.

Coaching involves:

- providing feedback on performance
- providing training and assistance to perform certain duties
- listening to problems and concerns
- observing team members in action
- understanding the capabilities of team members by identifying their strengths and weaknesses
- explaining and demonstrating how to implement customer service systems
- providing encouragement, hints and helpful tips
- providing opportunities to practise what is being learnt
- celebrating successes and achievements.

**Mentoring**

A mentor is usually a more senior staff member or someone who has considerable skills and experience who mentors someone in a more junior role who is keen to learn and capable of achieving more. Anyone can benefit from being mentored by people with more experience in certain areas than themselves. The mentoring relationship is one that should last some time for it to be of most benefit. Ideally, the two people involved should have some common ground. Mentors train, counsel and advise simultaneously and need to have ongoing contact with the person being mentored. Some companies have formal mentoring programs, but mentoring can work well on an informal basis.

Mentoring involves:

- being a role model in terms of behaviour and attitude
- providing emotional support and instilling confidence in new team members
- encouraging fair and ethical practices in customer service
- encouraging non-discriminatory work practices
- providing strategies for achieving work and personal goals
- providing career advice
- providing other feedback
- nominating team members for promotion
- protecting team members from the consequences of their actions.

# Australian Consumer Law

The *Competition and Consumer Act 2010* (Cth) aims to give businesses a fair and competitive operating environment. It covers anti-competitive conduct, price-fixing, unconscionable conduct and other issues, such as advertising. The Act also sets out consumers' rights and responsibilities, covering areas such as returns, refunds, warranties, contracts, marketing and advertising.

Every Australian business has the same rights and responsibilities under Australian Consumer Law (ACL), which is contained in a schedule to the Competition and Consumer Act. Your role is to ensure that ACL is embedded into your organisation's standards, policies and procedures.

There are a number of rules that businesses must abide by when dealing with customers.

**Consumer guarantees**

Under ACL, your organisation automatically provides your customers with a basic set of consumer guarantees when they purchase your products or services.

Consumer guarantees are intended to ensure your customers have rights if they buy a product that breaks easily, does not work or does not perform as expected. These consumer guarantees cannot be excluded, modified or limited by contract.

**Sales practices**

Organisations are required to provide proof of transactions to customers for goods or services valued at $75 or more, such as a tax invoice, a cash register receipt, a credit card or debit card statement, a handwritten receipt, a lay-by agreement or a receipt number provided for a telephone or internet transaction.

It is illegal to request payment for goods or services that the customer has not agreed to buy or to use referral selling, pyramid schemes, unconscionable conduct, or harassment and coercion to persuade a customer to purchase a product or service.

**Product safety**

Under ACL, the relevant Commonwealth, state and territory ministers can regulate consumer goods and product-related services.

They can do this by issuing safety warning notices, banning products on a temporary or permanent basis, imposing mandatory safety standards or issuing a compulsory recall notice to suppliers.

# Meet legislative requirements

There are a range of tips you and your team members can follow to ensure you do not breach ACL when dealing with your customers and other organisations.

Here is a list of actions you may take and what you should not do.

**Tips on what to do:**

- Set up a system to handle complaints and ensure that your organisation is able to comply with ACL.
- Delegate responsibility to a team member for overseeing direct selling techniques to ensure that your organisation's activities comply with ACL.
- Join an industry association that advises its members on how to comply with direct selling and other laws.
- Contact the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) to make a complaint if your organisation becomes the victim of any conduct by other businesses in breach of ACL and you cannot get the dispute resolved.

**Tips on what not to do:**

- Do not attempt to use exclude, modify or limit consumer guarantees.
- Do not mislead customers about their rights.
- Do not use physical force, coerce or harass customers in relation to the supply of, or payment for, goods and services.
- Do not act unconscionably when selling or supplying goods or services to customers or when dealing with other organisations.

## Example: encourage consistent implementation of customer service systems

Jacqui is the donor liaison manager at a charity that raises funds for medical research. The team she manages is responsible for receiving donations over the phone, in the mail and in person via a reception counter and donations collected on the street.

The board decides to implement a system that allows individuals and businesses to donate online. The system will not only incorporate a monetary transaction feature, but will also provide options for donors to give continually and start donor accounts with the organisation.

Jacqui and her team are responsible for implementing the system and providing the service to customers.

She arranges for a specialist to attend her workplace and conduct a comprehensive two-day training program on how to manage and maintain the online donations platform. She also encourages team members to use the online help desk to resolve technical issues with an outsourced IT provider.

Jacqui also creates a 30-day coaching schedule where she commits to spending 10 minutes a week with each of her team members to ensure they are consistently using the system to provide a quality service to customers and to address any concerns or queries they have.

## Practice task 3

1. List five customer service systems that organisations may implement.

*... continued*

2.  List four actions that organisations must take to comply with consumer laws.

3.  List three strategies you can use to encourage personnel to implement customer service systems in the workplace.

*... continued*

## 2B | Review customer feedback in consultation with others, identify problems and make adjustments

To monitor and maintain quality customer service, your organisation should seek ways to identify service delivery problems and make adjustments that increase client satisfaction and retention.

Gathering meaningful data from a variety of customer feedback methods enables you to discover the strengths and weaknesses of your customer service model and assists you to update or modify customer service systems appropriately.

Your role is to review customer feedback in consultation with appropriate personnel to promote an inclusive team culture that works together to achieve common organisational goals.

## Gather customer feedback

Gathering feedback is a key element of a customer service system. Your customers are the reason your business exists. Gathering feedback from them about your organisation's customer service quality helps refine and grow your business.

Customer feedback systems collect information about the way an organisation is perceived by its customers and this information should be collected in a targeted and deliberate way.

Feedback helps improve these customer service operations:

- communication with customers
- promptness with orders, deliveries, response times, etc.
- flexibility within each situation
- provision of information
- handling of problems or complaints
- opportunities to interact with the organisation.

## Feedback strategies

There are a range of methods you can use to gather feedback from your customers. The type of organisation you work for and the specific data you need to gather influence the customer feedback methods you select.

Make sure each feedback method is designed so the information you receive is easy to review, analyse and interpret.

Here are some feedback methods.

**1**

**Customer feedback forms**

Customer feedback forms can be given to the customer at the time of purchase. They are completed voluntarily by customers, which can reduce the number of responses received. The form must be designed so it is easy to review the feedback gathered; for example, tick a box or circle a response.

**2**

**Customer satisfaction surveys**

Surveys collect both qualitative and quantitative data. Questions are structured and standardised so every respondent answers the same questions in the same way. This reduces bias, ensures the feedback is reliable and valid, and makes the information easy to review. Surveys are an efficient way of collecting feedback from a large number of existing or potential clients.

**3**

**Interviews**

Customer interviews allow the organisation to explore particular issues in depth with a selected number of people, such as: What do you like about our organisation? What could we do to improve your customer service experience? Describe a situation where you were disappointed with the level of service you received. Do you find our website informative and easy to use?

**4**

**Focus groups**

A facilitator guides the group through a series of questions. The facilitator simply keeps the group on track and allows them freedom when answering questions and interacting with each other. In essence, the group leads the discussion while the facilitator records the group's responses.

**5**

**Toll-free feedback numbers**

An organisational feedback 'hotline' number can be used for customers to call free of charge to register any queries, complaints or issues. Toll-free feedback numbers are an easily accessible channel for communicating with the organisation. Make sure the system allows the information to be easily recorded so it can be reviewed at a later date.

**6**

**Online or physical suggestion box**

A suggestion box gives people the freedom to express opinions that they may otherwise be reluctant to voice in person. It helps organisations identify new ideas to improve customer service. Allocate time each week for the boxes to be cleared and the information recorded under separate categories of feedback, such as personnel, systems, ideas etc.

**7**

**Mystery shopper**

Mystery shoppers are hired by an organisation to monitor the customer service in their stores. They assess the organisation's customer service by posing as genuine customers. Provide them with a list of prearranged questions and issues to test on customer service representatives. They then complete an assessment report, which is used to review and analyse customer service performance.

**8**

**Third-party feedback**

Seek feedback via discussion or forms from third parties such as consultants, suppliers, contractors and industry bodies to find out an organisation's perceived customer service level.

Record how satisfied they are with the way the organisation conducts business with them, including communication methods, resolving issues or difficulties, negotiating and prompt payment of invoices.

**9**

**Social media monitoring**

Monitor your social media engagement and feedback where customers share their customer service experiences and make complaints. Social media can also be used to run surveys and test concepts. Prepare a system to record all feedback so it is easy to review.

**10**

**Secondary research**

Review data that already exists within the organisation to analyse customer service performance, such as the number of customer complaints received; number of product refunds, returns and exchanges; customer waiting times; net sales figures, market share, sales growth; staff performance appraisal data; staff turnover and absenteeism; quality assurance data; number of cancellations of services or appointments; number of existing clients.

## Customer service audit



A common way to measure customer satisfaction is to conduct a regular customer service audit, a process whereby procedures, practices and records are closely examined and checked to ensure they meet certain standards. A customer service order reviews the organisation's customer service performance by analysing the business from the customer's perspective.

The organisation performs a customer service audit by observing customer service staff interacting with customers, gathering and analysing information from customer feedback and complaints, conducting surveys, issuing questionnaires and asking third parties (such as industry bodies or suppliers) to comment on service levels.

Audits should be conducted regularly and their results reviewed and acted on.

# Manage the feedback process

When gathering feedback on your organisation's customer service and satisfaction, there are several issues to consider. Think about what type of information you would like to gather and how you are going to do it.

Here are some useful ideas to help you manage this process and receive meaningful results.

**Use historical data**

Decide whether the information you require has been collected and analysed in the past, so you can compare previous information with the latest service performance results. If it has, design a survey or structure interview questions based on the existing information or old surveys, so the data can be easily compared.

**Identify quantity**

When surveying customers or potential customers, decide how many responses you require in order to gather data that is sufficiently meaningful. Remember that some customers will not have the time or inclination to participate, so expect to approach more customers than you need. For example, if you want to collect 100 completed surveys, you may need to distribute up to 300.

**Offer incentives**

If you are going to send information out in hard copy, such as a survey or feedback form, you should also send a letter or note explaining what it is for. You may also need to offer customers something in return for their opinion and time, such as a free gift voucher or a $20 credit on their account.

**Select recipients**

If you are planning on monitoring feedback over time (for example, every six months), decide whether you want to contact a different group of customers every time or whether you plan to send surveys out to the same customers over and over again. Depending on what you are measuring, this could affect your results.

**Form questions**

If you are trying to decide what information you need to find out, prioritise the data you want to collect and design questions for each area. Test whether the questions you have written will give you the information you need by giving a sample to a colleague for their opinion.

**Select criteria**

Decide whether you want customers to rate service performance across criteria that you set, such as courtesy of staff, product knowledge or complaint resolution. If so, consider having customers rate your team from 1 to 5 (1 being poor, 5 being excellent). This type of feedback is a good way to monitor service delivery over a period of time against criteria that reflect the key responsibilities of your team or customer service areas.

**Record feedback**

Work out how feedback responses and results will be captured, recorded and analysed in the early stages of the review process. For instance, you may need to set up a database or spreadsheet that allows you to compare results over time, or to write up a report on general feedback. Consider why the information is being gathered in the first place and then work out how the data should be stored for analysis and review purposes.

**Encourage responses**

Motivating customers to respond to your requests for feedback is often difficult, possibly because they do not believe their complaints will be taken seriously. Many customers only contact the organisation if they are upset and have a complaint to make and many customers do not have the time to complete a feedback form or survey.

# Review customer feedback

Once you have monitored and gathered a sufficient amount of data from your customer feedback efforts, review and interpret the information to identify customer service problems.

Here are some ways to review and analyse customer feedback.

**Identify trends**

Identify major trends and themes, problems, opportunities and issues you observe, and write a statement about each. Record how frequently each major finding appears and list them in order of most common to least common. Assess the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats identified by each issue.

**Read comments**

Carefully read the comments written by customers on satisfaction surveys or feedback forms. Research has shown that even a small amount of feedback can provide information for a major breakthrough in service delivery. Identify comments that you can take direct action on to improve customer service. If you do nothing with customer comments, you are failing to meet that customer's particular needs, leaving the customer disgruntled or feeling as if their feedback is unimportant.

**Categorise comments**

Reading through customer feedback enables you to identify recurring patterns and trends in what your customers are saying about aspects of service delivery. These include things like the speed of your product deliveries, the helpfulness of your customer service team and the time it takes to respond to online customer inquiries. When reviewing customer feedback, group the comments into categories that are relevant to your organisation.

**Conduct root cause analysis**

Root cause analysis is a method of problem-solving used for identifying the root causes of dissatisfaction with your customer service delivery. It is essential that you understand what is influencing customer loyalty if you want to improve it. Make root cause analysis a priority when reviewing customer feedback and use your findings to identify what drives change. It may be necessary to train your team members to better understand and implement organisational quality assurance systems.

**Separate positive and negative feedback**

The customer feedback you receive will be either positive or negative. You should give equal weight to both. Positive feedback allows you to identify where your organisation effectively meets the needs of its customers, while negative feedback allows you discover areas in need of improvement. Separate positive and negative feedback and use it to close service delivery gaps.

> **Consolidate feedback results**
>
> After you have read, categorised and separated feedback, and identified trends and root causes, consolidate your results and develop a plan of action as to how you intend to respond to each of the issues raised. Make a feasible and effective plan that addresses all the problems your customers have identified, while maintaining the service delivery areas that are functioning well. This process will assist you to make recommendations that improve customer service systems and improve work practices.

# Consult and seek input from appropriate personnel

Review customer feedback in consultation with appropriate personnel and seek their input when addressing problems. The benefits of a consultative team culture include additional insights and ideas from different perspectives, an increase in staff satisfaction levels and stronger commitment to their jobs. Members of a team feel their opinions are valued and that they are playing an important role in the context of the organisation.

All teams benefit from understanding and managing agreed methods of gathering and reviewing customer feedback and measuring service delivery performance. While agreement can be partly determined by the team during collaborative strategy sessions or planning meetings, managers can also use their judgment to make final decisions on solutions that have mutual benefit.

Here are some tips for promoting consultation:

- Conduct team meetings to review customer feedback.
- Invite personnel to brainstorming sessions so they can contribute and strategise about how to address issues in service delivery.
- Use email and intranet services to facilitate communication between teams and other personnel.
- Share professional and personal skills, knowledge, experience and insights.
- Build consultation mechanisms into people's workplaces so they are encouraged to implement customer service systems.
- Provide feedback to personnel on the results their ideas have generated and the usefulness of these results.
- Promote and encourage personnel to share their thoughts and ideas and to communicate clearly and freely within the team.

# Identify customer service problems

Reviewing and analysing your customer feedback allows you to identify any developing problems that are negatively affecting the quality of your customer service. There are a number of common issues that customers make relating to customer service delivery. Having procedures in place to find solutions to common problems helps you resolve quality service issues quickly and improve work practices accordingly.

Common issues identified from customer feedback include:

- breakages or faults with products
- delays in delivery of products or services
- missing parts or components
- provision of poor advice or information
- refusal to accept returns or provide refunds or exchanges on products

- damaged stock
- poor provision of services
- lack of empathy from customer service staff
- slow inquiry response times
- failure to follow up on customer complaints.

# Use analytical thinking techniques

Address problems relating to customer service quality and work practices using formal analytical thinking techniques to generate possible solutions. Analytical thinking follows the scientific approach to problem-solving.

Here are examples of analytical thinking steps.

| Analytical thinking process |
|---|
| Define the problem: identify the customer service problem or issue that needs to be addressed, or the work practice that requires improvement. |
| Formulate the hypothesis: develop a tentative explanation for an observation that can be tested (proved or disproved) by further investigation. A hypothesis can be expressed as a root cause of the problem. |
| Collect the facts: organise, filter and consolidate the relevant customer feedback data to support the analyses required to prove or disprove the hypothesis. The information used should verify and apply to the issues you are trying to solve. |
| Conduct the analysis: analyse the data to find the root causes that quickly confirm or deny the hypothesis. Analysis provides an understanding of the issues and drivers behind the root causes. |
| Develop the solution: develop solutions that fit customer expectations and organisational objectives. Run an actual example through the final solution to evaluate the effectiveness of outcomes and identify opportunities for further improvement. |

# Make adjustments

Having identified problems relating to customer service, you should make adjustments to ensure continued service quality.

Some minor adjustments to service delivery can be implemented quickly and without a large expense to the organisation; for example, implementing or updating customer service standards. Others may take longer and involve several approval steps, including budgetary sign-off, before they can be implemented, such as changing or renovating the appearance of the organisation's premises.

The depth and effectiveness of your recommendations, and advice on future directions, will be influenced by the volume and quality of data gathered from your customer feedback system. You should ensure that the information gathered verifies and supports your recommendations with direct evidence.

Below are some recommendations for improving customer service.

| Recommendations for improving customer service |
| --- |
| • Adjustments to budget allocations, diverting more resources to customer service systems |
| • Role restructuring or changing responsibilities for customer service staff |
| • Adjusting or developing new customer service policies and procedures |
| • Employing new team members |
| • Purchasing new equipment and technology |
| • Developing advertising or marketing campaigns |
| • Improving point-of-sale equipment and procedures |
| • Establishing customer loyalty programs |

## Develop strategies

Based on your analysis and recommendations, develop strategies to prevent customer service problems from occurring in the future.

Remember that the purpose of customer service strategies is to enhance service levels in a way that allows your organisation to stand apart from its competitors. The kind of strategies your organisation determines to be appropriate to resolving customer service issues and improving work practices will be specific to the nature of your enterprise, the products or services offered, and the types of customers you serve.

Here are some strategies for resolving commonly identified customer service issues.

| Issue | Strategy to overcome issue |
| --- | --- |
| Faulty products | • Implement a process to investigate product faults with manufacturer.<br>• Develop product recall policy and procedures.<br>• Offer a replacement item or model.<br>• Repair the product if it is under warranty or consider replacing it regardless.<br>• Train team members to explain warranty conditions at the time of sale and repair. |
| Poor customer service | • Implement a process to investigate the customer service issue.<br>• Train team members in customer service skills.<br>• Rotate team members to increase their knowledge and skills in other areas; for example, customer complaints, recording customer orders, managing customer accounts.<br>• Encourage and support teamwork and consultation. |

*... continued*

| Issue | Strategy to overcome issue |
|---|---|
| Incorrect product descriptions | • Train team members to understand and provide accurate information about products and services.<br>• Ensure product literature and manufacturer instructions are readable and accessible by team members.<br>• Request specific product specifications from the manufacturer.<br>• Ensure team members explain warranty conditions to customers. |
| Slow delivery | • Investigate delivery lead times.<br>• Prioritise delivery schedules.<br>• Train team members to provide accurate delivery data. |
| Lack of communication skills | • Train team members in interpersonal communication skills.<br>• Demonstrate to team members how they should respond to customers with individual differences.<br>• Develop and use disciplinary procedures.<br>• Implement a documentation system to record shift changes.<br>• Utilise a customer relationship management system to ensure team members have access to current customer data. |
| Poor response to information requests | • Train team members in how to respond to specific customer requests.<br>• Set procedures on how to respond and response time frames.<br>• Provide tools, product literature and other reference materials to team members.<br>• Ensure team members know about your products and services. |
| Repeated complaints from same customers | • Examine the nature of customers' complaints.<br>• Try to determine the root cause of why the complaint is being made consistently.<br>• Discuss patterns and trends with your customers and your team. |

# Consider organisational requirements when improving work practices

Once the organisation's ability to meet its customers' service needs has been assessed and areas for improvement identified, the next step is to develop options and strategies for improving performance.

Find creative ways of encouraging and motivating your team members to improve their own work practices, such as implementing an employee rewards system or providing social events for team members to build positive workplace relationships.

Here are a number of issues and organisational requirements that must be considered when developing strategies to improve work practices.

### Target markets

The organisation's primary target market/customer must be kept firmly in mind when developing any strategies to improve customer service. Any potential strategy must be reviewed to ensure it will be effective at meeting the needs of your target market. A particular strategy may sound excellent in theory, but you should ensure it will not alienate or disappoint your ideal customer.

### Organisational structure

The organisation's structure ensures various departments and people within it have responsibility for various areas of the organisation's operations. Any potential customer service strategies must be developed in conjunction with those whose responsibility it is to develop, produce, market and sell products and services, as well as the people responsible for interacting with customers and providing customer service.

### Organisational goals and objectives

Organisational goals and objectives are the most important consideration when developing customer service strategies. All departments within an organisation must be working together to achieve wider organisational goals. Customer service strategies must align with these goals and objectives, and the organisation's overall market position.

### Existing customer service policies and procedures

Many organisations have formalised policies and procedures in place that operate as guidelines for all team members when interacting with customers. An organisation's existing customer service policies and procedures need to be referenced and kept in mind when proposing strategies and improvements to customer service.

### Resource considerations and restrictions

In formulating any strategy designed to improve customer service, the resources at your disposal must be kept firmly in mind to ensure funds are available to implement any proposed strategy. For example, if you have identified that customers are demanding longer business hours, then a strategy aimed at opening for an extra hour each day needs to factor in whether the organisation has the staff and money available to be able to implement the strategy.

### Quality assurance

Most organisations have quality assurance procedures in place to ensure operations are performed to a standard. It is important to factor quality assurance requirements into any proposed customer service strategy, to ensure you do not violate or come into conflict with quality assurance requirements.

### Work health and safety (WHS)

Work health and safety considerations must be taken into account when developing or following customer service policies and procedures and WHS guidelines addressed when devising any proposed strategies aimed at improving customer service.

WHS requirements are enforced rigorously by governments and are in place to minimise workplace injuries not only to staff, but also to customers, suppliers and visitors.

### Confidentiality and security

Customer confidentiality and security are increasing issues of concern for customers, given the prevalence of electronic commerce and the collection of customer information when purchasing.

Many customers are reluctant to provide details such as surnames, addresses, phone numbers or credit card details, for fear of having their privacy and security violated. It is therefore important to have policies and procedures in place for maintaining customer confidentiality and security.
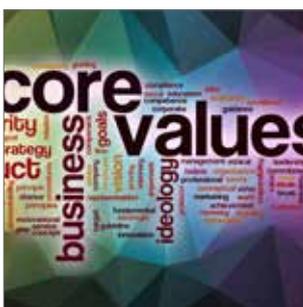
### Ethical standards

A code of conduct states the rules, values, ethical standards and vision for your organisation. Having a code of conduct in your workplace provides staff with clear standards and expectations of how to behave in the workplace, respect others and provide quality customer service.

It is important that your team members understand and agree to the organisation's code of conduct, as their compliance with the code helps to build your organisation's reputation.

## Example: review customer feedback, identify problems and make adjustments

Sven is the customer service manager at Tired Tyres, a company that supplies and replaces tyres, wheels and car batteries. The company has been experiencing stiff competition from other businesses providing similar services in the area and as a result, sales are steadily decreasing.

The business owner, Daniel, asks Sven to develop a customer feedback system that provides meaningful data about customer satisfaction and the quality of service delivery. Sven seeks input from his customer service team members and together they develop a customer service satisfaction survey. The survey is emailed to all existing customers, whose contact information has been recorded on an internal database at the time of making a purchase.

After three months, Sven and his team review and analyse the customer feedback data and identify that an overwhelming number of customers of Tired Tyres are dissatisfied with the way customer service representatives treat them when they come into the store for assistance.

Sven seeks approval from Daniel for his team to undergo training in customer service and interpersonal communication skills immediately. Sven also consults with Daniel to revise their customer service standards to ensure they focus on courtesy, politeness and prompt service to customers.

v1661

## Practice task 4

1.  Create a short customer service satisfaction survey for a store you are familiar with. Pay special attention to the way you word your questions to ensure they achieve your aim.

*... continued*
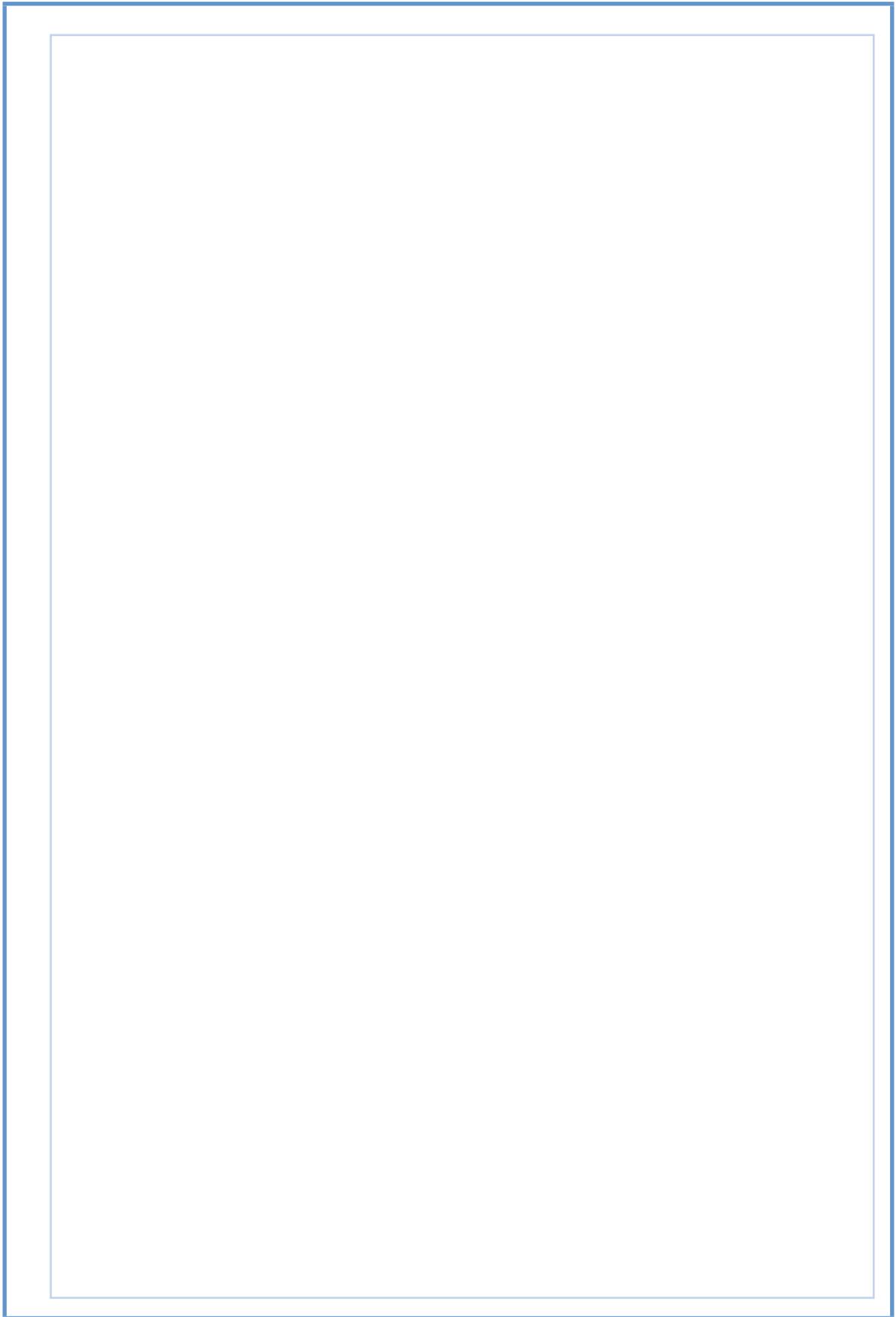
*continued ...*

*... continued*

2.  Trial your customer service satisfaction survey with a colleague, supervisor or another staff member and write a summary of how useful the form was to gather meaningful customer feedback.

3.  Prepare to review the results. List the analytical processes you should follow to determine the results of your feedback.

4.  What improvement decisions are likely to be made if the analysis identifies slow delivery of products as a problem?

*... continued*

## 2C Communicate adjustments to service delivery to all involved, within time frames

Once you have made adjustments in order to improve work practices and ensure continued service quality, you must communicate these adjustments to all relevant personnel, within appropriate time frames.

Develop a communication or presentation plan that includes identification of your audience and relevant content, and present your findings using appropriate language conventions.

Select the most appropriate communication method to let others know about the new arrangements.

## Identify your audience

Effective communication means conveying information appropriately using a variety of communication strategies. The communication methods you use may vary significantly between various groups of people.

When identifying a need for changes to client service delivery, there are several people and groups you may need to report to, such as client service representatives, senior management, other departments within your organisation, committees, clients, suppliers, contractors and external organisations.

Once you have identified the changes to client service that need to take place, this must be reported to and discussed with one or more of these groups or individuals, depending on the nature of your organisation.

These groups need to know about the changes because:

- they (or their team) may be the ones who need to change the way they are doing things
- they may have the authority to approve the actions you are proposing
- they may need to know of your intentions so their own actions or processes complement or support the new strategies you are implementing
- they may need to release or approve funds
- they may need to communicate your proposed change to their own teams or other stakeholders
- they may need to check that your proposed actions are within organisational guidelines and any rules or laws that apply to your industry
- their feedback may be useful in determining implementation plans
- you may need their help in training your team or others within the organisation about the benefits that the proposed change will bring.

## Select communication methods

The means by which you communicate your customer service improvement strategies must be suitable for your target audience. For example, how you communicate a strategy to sales staff is likely to differ to the way you present to senior management.

The nature of the strategy you are communicating also affects the communication method you should use. For example, a major change in customer service systems involving multiple departments within the organisation requires a more formal presentation than a minor adjustment to business operating hours.

Here is more about different communication methods.

| Communication methods | |
|---|---|
| • Formal presentations | • Team meetings |
| • Training sessions | • Policies and procedures manuals |
| • Written reports | • Customer information sessions |
| • Updates on company website | • Advertising on television, in print or online |
| • Emails | • Flyers |
| • Promotional handouts or brochures | • Company memos |
| • Promotional CDs or DVDs | • Regular company newsletters |
| • Intranet announcement | • Noticeboard in staff rooms |

# Include relevant content

Your presentation or communication should provide a comprehensive explanation of how customer feedback was gathered, describe the review and analysis process, identify problems with customer service delivery, suggest a range of possible solutions, and make recommendations about how customer service should be adjusted or improved.

Make your audience aware of the implications or consequences if no action is taken to address issues with service delivery and emphasise the importance of agreeing on a resolution as soon as possible.

Here are areas to consider when presenting your customer service improvement strategies.

**Issues**

**Describe customer service issues**

Before informing others of the changes being implemented, it is important to advise them on the customer service issues that have been identified. Always summarise the evidence you have collected from customer feedback efforts and outline the process you have used to draw conclusions.

**Needs**

**Describe customer service needs**

Provide your audience with a customer service objective or goal. Explain clearly what your customers desire from the organisation and then compare this to what you are currently delivering. Highlight any discrepancies to demonstrate to others why the necessary adjustments and improvements must be made. Discuss the performance of competitors and the services they are offering to identify how your organisation can gain a competitive edge.

### Inaction

**Describe the implications of inaction**

Clearly state what is likely to occur if adjustments to customer service delivery are not actioned. Make sure that your audience clearly understands the implications of failing to deliver a quality service to customers, such as a loss of business, decrease in revenue, potential job cuts or damage to the organisation's reputation. If possible, link the problem and the consequences of inaction to your wider organisational objectives or describe how this contravenes your customer service charter.

### Solutions

**Describe a range of possible solutions**

Identify and list the various options that exist to address customer service issues. Doing this demonstrates how you have reviewed the situation extensively and decided to implement a solution based on thorough research and analysis. Explain the different solutions available and why they should be considered, as well as any benefits or limitations. Keep in mind that anyone who has authority to approve an adjustment to customer service delivery will be interested in the costs involved to implement the change.

### Resources

**Describe the resource implications**

Your presentation must include budgetary considerations and identify the costs involved in implementing any recommended adjustments to customer service delivery. Imagine you and your team have identified two possible solutions to a customer service issue you need to address. You have been asked to make a recommendation to your own manager about the best solution. This must include detailed information about the costs. You cannot make a recommendation if you do not know which solution is the more expensive.

### Recommendations

**Recommend a solution**

From the range of possible solutions, make a case for the recommendation you believe will best achieve the desired outcome. This decision should be made with the input of relevant personnel within your organisation. As you and your team members are familiar with customer service issues and solutions, you should include their ideas and opinions in your presentation to verify your recommendations.

# Present your findings

You should present your customer service improvement strategies in a format that is suitable for your audience, clearly and effectively communicates your recommendations, and meets organisational guidelines. Your workplace may have a template, form, procedure or other preferred method of collating and presenting customer research data.

Here are the steps involved in preparing a written report that communicates your strategies and recommendations.

## Prepare a written report

**1**

### Introduction

An introduction explains how and when the customer feedback data has been collected and the purpose for which the information is sought.

**2**

### Goals and objectives

A description of the goals and objectives for carrying out the research and what you are hoping to discover, such as identifying customer needs or gaps in customer service delivery.

**3**

### Grading system

Explain the grading system used to measure customer satisfaction (if applicable); for example, whether customers have been asked to rate service on a scale of 1 to 10 or to circle relevant answers.

**4**

### Findings

Clearly summarise your findings by describing the results of the feedback, including areas where customer service has improved and areas where problems exist.

**5**

### Explanation

Provide possible explanations for why improvements have occurred or why problems exist, such as a lack of customer service training.

**6**

### Resources

Identify the potential resource requirements for implementing change.

**7**

**Use of the results**

Explain how you intend to use the results to make adjustments to customer service quality.

**8**

**Time frame**

Describe the change implementation plan, including appropriate time frames.

## Update workplace documents

You may be required to present your strategies and recommendations by updating or revising customer service standards, policies, procedures or other existing workplace documentation affected by the customer feedback results.

Identify sections that need to be changed, updated, removed or added to ensure that your organisation complies with legislative requirements and regulations, maintains a high standard of ethical conduct, and communicates the values, attitudes and behaviours required by employees to provide a quality service to customers.

Examples of standards, policies and procedures to revise:

- Customer service standards
- Customer complaints policy
- Code of conduct
- Staff training policies
- Sales practices
- Record keeping
- Use of technology affecting work practices (e.g. rules around staff internet usage)

## Use verbal language conventions

Verbal communication involves the use of spoken words to deliver an intended message.

There are a range of verbal language conventions and techniques that you can use to encourage and motivate your audience to accept your recommendations to improve customer service quality.

## Choice of words

Your choice of words conveys information both about you and about how you view the person you are communicating with. A formal choice of words demonstrates trust, respect and consideration, and sets a professional tone. Less formal word choices show familiarity and comfort, and set a more conversational tone. It is important to recognise the difference between formal and informal word choice to ensure you alter your communication style accordingly.

You should also consider the different word choices required when communicating orally and in written formats. Written information can be recorded, passed on and used for future reference. Even if your client relationships have reached informal terms, your written words must consistently demonstrate a professional tone that can extend well beyond the intended recipient.

# Choice of content

Choice of content is another essential component of effective verbal communication. It is vital that as a manager, you are able to apply listening skills and exchange feedback regarding the topics at hand. Appropriate use of questioning skills, specifically open questions, can steer a conversation in the appropriate direction.

- Your communication should state a point of view or specific piece of information as briefly as possible. As long as your wording is clear, the fewer words used, the less likely your client will become confused.
- Clear and direct verbal communication conveys respect for your client's time. Relevance and impact are improved through succinct phrasing.
- Choose your content with the intention of making your message as clear as possible.
- Avoid jargon and colloquial language in order to increase rapport.

# Tone, projection, pronunciation and clarity

It is not only what you say that is important, but how you say it. Pay attention to the tone of your voice and how you articulate the words. Listen to experienced people to see how they engage the audience and get their message across.

Here are more verbal language techniques.

**Tone of voice**

Tone of voice refers to the rising or falling of pitch that conveys meaning in a sentence. We distinguish questions from statements based on voice tone. Sarcasm, emphasis and surprise are often intoned in our voices.

Your clients can gain insightful understanding from your intonation when you are communicating verbally with them. Because the nuances of speech are missing in written language, the use of intoned speech relates to oral communication only.

**Voice modulation**

Voice projection relates to adjustment in the strength of voice in order to cover varying distances and remain clear. Voice modulation refers to adjustment in pitch or tone in order to be heard by an audience.

It is important that the strength and volume of your voice are appropriate for the environment in which you are communicating. If you are too quiet or speak with a monotonous tone, your client may become uninterested or miss what you are saying. If you speak too loudly, your client may become distracted or feel uncomfortable.

**Pronunciation**

Articulation focuses on the making of individual sounds, and pronunciation focuses on the stress, rhythm and intonation of the syllables in words. You change the sounds coming from your vocal folds by moving your teeth, tongue and lips in recognisable patterns.

When communicating with clients, make sure you are not substituting or omitting sounds when you say a word, and pay particular attention to common sound substitutions so that you speak clearly and confidently.

**Clarity of speech**

Clarity of speech refers to the ability to be heard and understood. Clarity of speech can be achieved by closely looking at the way you speak: how you say it and what you say. Using correct enunciation to pronounce a word clearly makes you easier to understand when communicating with a diverse range of clients.

You should avoid using 'filler' words; for example, 'um', 'like', 'actually' and 'basically'. You gain more clarity when you watch for the words that you repeat often without even realising. Consider whether these words bring value to your communication.

# Improve verbal communication skills

Here are some tips to help you to improve your verbal communication skills when presenting adjustments to customer service delivery.

### Tips for improving your verbal communication skills

**1** **Know your material**

If you know your topic thoroughly, you feel more at ease talking about it and will be able to respond if people ask questions. You will sound more natural in your response and more interesting to the audience if you are knowledgeable and interested in what you are saying.

**2** **Know your audience**

You may have to do some research to find out how much your audience knows and what they are hoping to learn. You can then tailor your communication or presentation to the audience's needs. People quickly switch off if they think they already know what you are talking about.

**3**

### Prepare

Communicating with your audience is easier if you are well prepared. Nervousness disappears once you start talking about a topic you have prepared well. Audiences are very quick to notice if a presentation is poorly prepared.

**4**

### Practise

Be sure to practise your presentation. Public speaking becomes easier the more you do it. It can be helpful to practise in front of a mirror, with a supportive friend or colleague or in the location where your presentation is to take place.

**5**

### Make it interesting

Engage your audience by keeping them interested, with their attention focused on you. Maintaining eye contact during verbal communication will help. Make sure your choice of content is interesting, useful and realistic. Try not to be repetitive or tell the audience what they already know.

**6**

### Encourage questions

Encourage your audience to ask questions and offer suggestions. Use your voice; a confident voice encourages people to believe and accept what you say, much more so than the actual words you are saying.

**7**

### Use visual aids

Most presentations benefit from the use of visual aids. People become bored listening to one voice and looking at the same thing for too long. Visual aids such as slides, handouts, graphs and products must be simple and well placed. However, do not let your visual aids do the talking for you.

## Use nonverbal language conventions

As you interact with others, you constantly give and receive nonverbal signals. The way you sit, the gestures you make, the pace or projection of your voice, your posture and the amount of eye contact you make are all nonverbal signals that send strong messages to your audience.

What you say verbally and what you convey through your body language are two very different things. When your verbal output is congruent with your nonverbal signals, you improve the clarity of your messages and establish trust and rapport.

Here are examples of nonverbal language techniques you can use to present customer service adjustments to others.

# Nonverbal language conventions

## Active listening

Active listening is the fastest way to gain important information from your audience. After listening to questions, queries or suggestions from others, send back your interpretation of what you think you heard them say, giving feedback in their own words, to check that you have received the information correctly. The person is likely to then correct you or reiterate what you have said, simultaneously underlining the essence of their message.

To show you are actively listening to your audience members, use positive reinforcement, smile, make eye contact and use a forward-facing posture.

## Eye contact

The way you look at your audience can communicate many things, including interest, attraction, hostility or affection. Maintaining eye contact shows honesty and directness about what you are saying. It is not possible to build rapport during face-to-face communication without engaging in eye contact.

Eye contact also maintains the flow of conversation and allows you to gauge the audience's responses. You can decide if they are actively interested or not.

## Facial expressions

Through the intricacies of facial expressions, you are able to express countless emotions without saying a word. The human face can be extremely expressive.

Emotions such as happiness, anger, surprise or sadness are identified by characteristic muscle movements that result in smiles, lowered eyes, raised eyebrows or frowns. Try to pay attention to the signals you are giving off, ensuring you do not display any undesirable expressions.

## Voice

We communicate with our voices even when we are not using words. Nonverbal elements of speech such as tone, pitch, volume, rhythm, pace and inflection provide subtle but powerful clues to our true feelings and what we really mean. In addition to the words actually being spoken, your audience is also reading your voice and listening for tones that indicate confidence.

Ensure you do not use tones that send negative signals such as anger or sarcasm. Your voice should convey confidence, interest and encouragement.

### Gestures

Gestures communicate interest and involvement, ranging from minimal (hands in pockets) to frantic (waving wildly in the air). Gestures are integral to our daily lives. We point, wave, beckon and use our hands unconsciously to articulate ourselves.

When presenting your ideas, try not to fiddle with your jewellery, a pen or your hair. Your hands should not be in your pockets. If you clasp your hands together or fold your arms across your chest, your audience may read you as closed and defensive, even if you do not intend this. It has been suggested that gestures are most effective when your hands are above your waist and below your shoulders. Strong gestures have a beginning and an end; the hands come to rest and then gesture again, rather than making continuous small gestures.

### Body orientation and posture

Body orientation refers to the positioning of your body in relation to others. When you present to an audience, ensure you do not orientate your body away from them, as this could send a message of disinterest or the desire to move away. Orienting your body towards your audience indicates that you are actively interested and involved.

Good body posture is equally important. Your audience may read poor posture, such as slouching or leaning against a wall, as apathetic or lazy and feel as though you are not interested in the interaction. Poor posture may stop people from approaching you or seeking to find out more about your products or services. Good posture shows your client that you are aware, alert, approachable and confident.

### Touch

Touch relates to physical touch between yourself and another person, and this may not always be appropriate in a professional setting.

One of the most common types of touch in a business setting is the handshake. A firm handshake communicates confidence and reassurance. However, handshaking is a form of ritualistic touching specific to Western culture. It is critical that you become aware of the cultural rituals of others, as these may vary dramatically from yours.

### Space and distance

It is important that you understand and respect the personal space of others when presenting to them. Standing too close to someone could make them feel uncomfortable. Space can be used to convey many nonverbal messages, such as dominance, aggression, intimacy or affection.

It is important to be aware of the nonverbal signals that indicate discomfort with invasions of personal space and to distance yourself appropriately.

<div style="border:1px solid #000">

**Appearance**

Appropriate appearance in the business environment will vary depending on your vocation and organisational requirements. Even so, in most business settings your appearance should be neat and professional in order to present yourself as confident, capable and trustworthy.

Your appearance sets the tone for your interactions. Clothes should be sensible and well fitted. Try not to wear distracting accessories. Neat and tidy personal grooming is of utmost importance.

</div>

## Improve your nonverbal communication skills

There is a range of actions you can take to improve your nonverbal communication skills when presenting adjustments to customer service delivery.

**Tips for improving nonverbal communication skills**

- Mirror the other person's body language
- Don't be stiff; keep yourself relaxed when sitting or standing
- Maintain strong eye contact
- Show a genuine smile (not a smirk)
- Avoid unnecessary head movement and keep your head straight yet relaxed
- Give compliments by nodding or giving a thumbs up
- Think and believe that there is already rapport, to avoid looking awkward
- Use proper body language to leverage your success
- Lower the pitch of your voice
- Use hand gestures while speaking

## Communicate within appropriate time frames

It is important to communicate adjustments in service delivery within appropriate or designated time frames, to ensure strategies are implemented in line with organisational goals and objectives.

On those occasions when implementation of the decision impacts on customers, other departments or work areas, or other organisations, you need to provide timely advice to those concerned. This is particularly important when there may be a negative reaction to your message.

Ensure that, in such cases, the information is shared promptly and clearly with all relevant parties. Open and timely communication helps minimise the likelihood of gossip and the rumours that often surround changes to procedures. You are also more likely to secure the support and commitment of other people when they feel they have been involved in the early stages of the change process.

# Develop an implementation plan for changes

In identifying changes to be made to customer service standards and reporting to designated groups and individuals, it is important to develop a plan for implementing the changes you have identified. This reduces uncertainty within the organisation, because all groups and individuals are aware of what is happening and what action is required by them.

A key part of this process is developing a time frame for implementation that outlines each of the steps required to implement the change and the due dates for completion.

The implementation plan must also go into further detail and specify the exact actions that make up each step in the process of implementing the change. The more specific the plan is, the better you will be able to plan each activity, monitor its progress and organise resources for carrying out the strategy.

Here are processes typically used when implementing a new strategy or improvement.

## Implementation of a new client service strategy

**1** **Seek approval**

Seek approval for the new client service strategy from the managing director or senior management team.

**2** **Conduct a team meeting**

Conduct a team meeting to discuss approval and make final changes to the new strategy. Ensure you provide team members with opportunities to raise concerns and make comments.

**3** **Prepare support materials**

Prepare and distribute support materials to team members.

**4** **Support your team**

Support your team to start using the new process or system.

**5** **Conduct a review meeting**

Conduct a review meeting to check how well the new strategy is working.

**6** **Distribute a satisfaction survey**

Distribute a client satisfaction survey to gain client feedback.

## Example: communicate adjustments in service delivery

Here is an example of a comprehensive implementation plan.

| Change or improvement | Steps to implement the change or improvement | Time frame | Person or team responsible |
|---|---|---|---|
| Change customer service budget | • Inform team members of cutbacks to the client services budget and what this will mean (e.g. no gift vouchers for unhappy clients) | 20 May | Gordon (Managing Director) |
| | • Explain why this is happening | 20 May | Gordon |
| | • Invite group discussion so the impact of the new budget is understood and any challenges can be discussed and resolved | 21 May | Emily (Customer Service Manager) |
| | • Explain any new procedures and rules | 21 May | Emily |
| | • Ask for team member cooperation and thank them | 25 May | Gordon & Emily |
| | • Explain how performance will be monitored | 25 May | Emily |
| Changes to products or services | • Inform team members of new product changes | 16 April | Derek (Operations Manager) |
| | • Provide team members with training and support materials | 25 April | Meredith (HR Manager) & Kyle (Customer Service Manager) |
| | • Explain to team members when they are expected to know the new information and why | 25 April | Kyle |
| | • Explain the assistance team members will receive | 25 April | Meredith |
| | • Review team member knowledge of new product or service specifications | 1–14 May | Kyle |
| | • Provide follow-up training and assistance if necessary | Ongoing | Meredith & Kyle |

## Practice task 5

A customer service improvement strategy should include a plan outlining the steps required to implement the change and should calculate the time frame necessary to complete each step. Use the information in this table to develop a plan for implementing new customer service software in an organisation.

| Change or improvement | Steps to implement the change or improvement | Time frame | Person or team responsible |
|---|---|---|---|
| Implement new customer service software | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |

## 2D Coordinate and manage delivery of services and products to ensure they meet quality standards

A key responsibility for managers is to coordinate and manage the delivery of products and services to ensure they meet agreed quality standards.

Making it easy and enjoyable for your customers to purchase your goods and services is an important customer service strategy for your organisation. This is particularly important when customers place orders or apply for goods and services not immediately available or to be delivered on a future date.

By receiving fast and efficient service, satisfied customers will return to your organisation to buy your products or use your services, and are also likely to recommend your organisation to others.

## Manage service and product delivery

Organisations should have developed and implemented strategies to coordinate and manage efficient and effective delivery of goods and services.

Be confident that you and your team understand the procedures for taking customer orders, confirming what has been ordered, confirming the order status (that is, pending, ordered, processed or delivered) and receiving customer payments.

Here are typical steps for confirming orders, billing, delivery, credit and lay-by, and ensuring there is clear communication at all times.

**Confirm orders**

Confirming orders gives the customer confidence that their order will proceed as expected. Depending on your organisation, confirming an order may be done via a phone call; however, written confirmation should be included in your documentation process. Written confirmation may include emails, order forms, faxes, text messages, purchase orders or a unique order number provided over the phone. Not only does order confirmation allow you to finalise your customer service records, it also shows your customers that you care about their business.

**Billing**

Your organisation should provide easy and accessible ways for your customers to pay for your products or services. The purpose of a bill is to clearly set out to the customer what they are paying for and the amount that must be paid. To meet quality service standards, you should provide a billing inquiries service, as well as various bill payment options, to make the payment process as efficient and accessible for customers as possible. You must also ensure that additional shipping or delivery costs are clearly explained and agreed to by customers before payment.

**Delivery**

Meeting delivery deadlines you have set and communicated to your customers enhances your reputation and ensures you meet quality service standards. If you have provided a customer with a delivery date, do your utmost to meet it. If there are unexpected delays or if goods have been damaged in transit, you must notify your customers and ensure they are clear about the issue and when they can expect delivery to be rescheduled. Offer simple, fast solutions to your customers if delayed delivery causes them any stress or concern. It is an offence to accept payment for products or services that you do not intend to supply. For this reason, you must ensure that you have sufficient stock, or can obtain stock, to meet customer orders. Consider any possible delays that may occur in manufacturing or distribution before you accept payment from a customer.

**Credit**

If your organisation is in the business of providing money to customers to purchase goods, services or land, or to hire or lease goods, you are providing credit. If you charge for the credit you supply to customers, there are legislative requirements you must comply with. Failure to comply can lead to heavy penalties. For this reason, check your obligations when providing credit with the Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC) to ensure you maintain quality customer service.

**Lay-by**

A lay-by agreement allows customers to purchase a product and pay for it in two or more instalments before taking it into their possession. It is essential that you understand the rights of customers with respect to written agreements and how you or the customer can cancel lay-by orders. Make sure you provide customers with a copy of the lay-by agreement stating all the terms and conditions, including any fees associated with termination. The agreement should contain important information such as payment dates, amounts and any extra charges for cancellation, and what happens when a customer does not return to collect an order. Keep copies of the agreement and receipts for deposit and instalments. Try to resolve any lay-by issues by discussing them with your customer first.

**Communication**

Aim to communicate with your customers consistently from the time they order a product or service to the moment the item has been delivered and payment processed. As well as confirming orders, many organisations have automated systems in place that send customers emails or text message notifications to let them know that a payment has been received, an order is in transit, the day an order will be delivered or whether an order is waiting at a post office to be collected. Some organisations go even further and confirm when an order has been collected or received. This is done to ensure it is the correct customer who has taken the goods into possession. You meet customer service standards when you maintain consistent communication with your customers.

# Meet quality standards

The key to meeting quality customer service standards is building positive relationships with your customers, thanking them for their business and promoting a positive, helpful and friendly environment that makes the customer experience enjoyable.

Here is more information about the elements that comprise quality customer service.

**Deliver prompt service to customers**

To provide prompt service to customers, ensure your customer service team has thorough understanding of product and service information, including prices, range, availability, features and consumer guarantees. If your customers feel you cannot provide them with sufficient information about a product or service, they will not have the confidence to buy. You must immediately notify your team members if details about your products or services change or any special offers or promotions are in place.

Your team members should never be surprised or not know how to answer a particular customer query. Provide training and access to customer service policies and procedures, especially those relating to payment methods, order processing and delivery logistics. It is essential to provide this information accurately in order to meet quality service standards.

**Manage resources**

It is essential to manage any resources that are required to meet quality standards in the provision of products and services. For example, if product delivery times are inefficient, you could consider allocating more resources to engaging a third-party logistics company that has systems and protocols in place to guarantee on-time delivery.

If customers are becoming frustrated with long call wait times when trying to book a service with your organisation, consider allocating funds to the development of an online service booking system that allows customers to order services anytime online or from a smart device.

## Collaborate with your team members

To maintain quality customer service, it is important that everyone in your team, and in the organisation, works collaboratively and understands their role and responsibilities, in order to achieve joint outcomes. A consultative team culture promotes two-way communication processes that allow everyone to take part in decision-making.

Work with your team members to develop, implement and reinforce quality customer service standards. Provide incentives, devised collectively, to reward customer service staff for their commitment to improving service delivery. Agree on benchmarks and KPIs to monitor performance in meeting quality standards. Encourage team members to support each other in completing team activities and achieving team goals.

## Know your products and services

One of the most crucial aspects of quality customer service is for you and your team members to know and understand the products and services offered by your organisation. Understanding service and product features allows you to present the benefits accurately and persuasively. Customers respond to enthusiastic service staff who are passionate about their products and eager to share the benefits with them.

You should use both conventional and creative sources of information to learn about your products or services, including your own experiences, product literature, online forums, feedback from customers, trade and industry publications, internal sales records, your team members, manufacturer visits and sales training programs.

As you engage customers, use your knowledge to lead them through the sales process and make their customer service experience an enjoyable one that they will want to repeat.

## Build customer relationships

To meet quality customer service standards, it is essential that you and your team members develop positive customer relationships. Treat each customer as an individual, greeting them by name and approaching them in a way that fits their individual situation. Show customers that you understand their needs and preferences by findings solutions for them that may be cheaper or more convenient. Alert your customer to promotions, events or additional products and services that may be of personal interest to them.

## Example: coordinate and manage service and product delivery

The following example demonstrates how a manager coordinates the delivery of products and services to meet agreed quality standards.

| Task | Quality standard | Coordination and management |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Describe product to customer | Product described accurately | Ensure information sheets are supplied to team members |
| Process customer order | Order processed successfully | Ensure ordering system is efficient and easy to use |
| Confirm customer order | Order confirmation sent to customer | Ensure customer receives accurate order confirmation details |
| Process customer payment | Payment processed successfully | Ensure correct payment is taken and payment system is running efficiently |
| Deliver product to customer | Product delivered safely within agreed time frames | Ensure team members are trained in delivery procedures |
| Manage return of faulty product | Customer guarantee honoured, product returned and customer refunded | Ensure returns, refunds and exchanges policy is accurate and up to date |

## Practice task 6

Read the case study, then complete the questions that follow.

### Case study

Phoebe is the customer service manager at Earthy Gear, an online business selling hiking and camping gear to customers out of a large warehouse in northern Queensland. Earthy Gear is one of Australia's leading independent service-oriented adventure stores and prides itself on its value-added services, which extend beyond the payment for a customer's product. As well as everyday low prices, Earthy Gear promises super-fast delivery, a genuine registered manufacturer's warranty, expert technical advice from passionate outdoor staff, spare parts, ongoing customer support and a loyalty program, knowledge base and online support. Phoebe's customer service team has undertaken product knowledge training and has ongoing access to product features and specifications, as well as order processing and delivery procedures, via the business intranet.
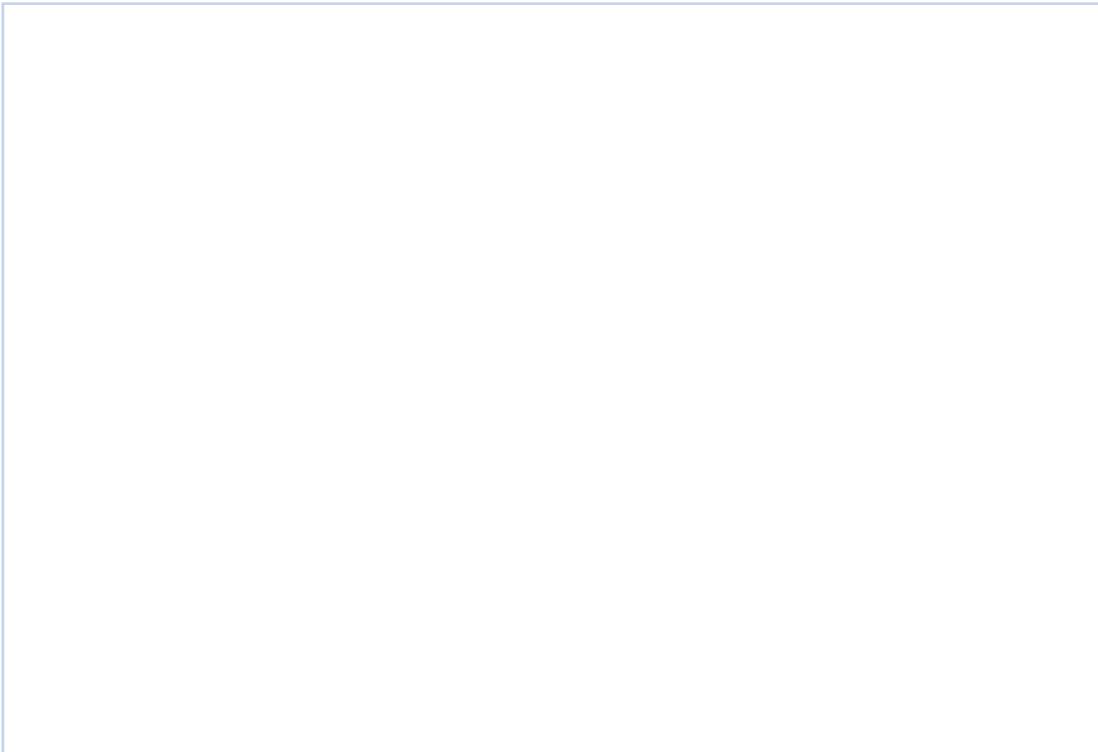
*... continued*

1.  Describe how Phoebe and her customer service team at Earthy Gear can meet agreed quality service standards.

2.  If problems with customer service were to arise, how could Phoebe collaborate with her team members to ensure services and products were effectively and efficiently delivered?

## Summary

1. The success of a customer service system requires the commitment of all those involved in implementing it, which is everyone in the organisation.

2. Your customer service systems should differentiate your organisation from your competitors by making the customer experience more efficient, accessible and engaging.

3. Gathering meaningful data from a variety of customer feedback methods enables you to discover the strengths and weaknesses of your customer service model and assists you to update or modify customer service systems appropriately.

4. Reviewing and analysing your customer feedback allow you to identify any developing problems that are negatively affecting the quality of your customer service.

5. The ways that you communicate your customer service improvement strategies must be suitable for your target audience.

6. It is important to communicate adjustments to service delivery within appropriate or designated time frames to ensure strategies are implemented in line with organisational goals and objectives.

7. A key responsibility for managers is to coordinate and manage the delivery of products and services to ensure they meet agreed quality standards.

## Learning checkpoint 2
## Implement customer service systems

This learning checkpoint allows you to review your skills and knowledge in implementing customer service systems.

## Part A

1. Explain why it is important to encourage all personnel to consistently implement customer service systems.

2. Explain how consumer guarantees under Australian Consumer Law protect the rights and responsibilities of customers.

3. Describe three methods of collecting customer feedback on service delivery.

4. Explain how the comments written on customer feedback forms are useful for reviewing customer satisfaction.

5. Explain the importance of analysis when addressing customer service problems and generating possible solutions.

6. Explain why it is important to use tone and vocabulary that are appropriate to the audience and specific purpose of a communication.

7. Explain why it is important for customer service staff to maintain thorough knowledge of the products and services offered by their organisation.

8. Provide an example of how resources should be managed to meet quality standards in the coordination and management of product and service delivery.

# Part B

Read the case study, then answer the questions that follow.

## Case study

Linda is the customer service manager at Western River IT, an organisation providing home networking solutions, equipment and devices to individual customers. The team she manages is responsible for selling home networking products using a traditional telephone system. Linda has just received the results from a three-month customer satisfaction survey. She reviews the feedback by using a formal analytical approach to identify the trends and root causes of problems with service delivery. She discovers that an overwhelming number of customers are dissatisfied with the level of product knowledge held by members of Linda's customer service team. Customers have also indicated their frustration at experiencing lengthy call wait times and online inquiry response times, sometimes up to 14 days.

1. Describe one adjustment Linda could make to improve each of the following in response to the feedback, and identify the potential resource requirements for each:

   • Customer service procedures

   • Customer service delivery

   • Work practices

2. Linda has been asked to prepare a written report to communicate her recommendations for improvements to customer service delivery. Describe how she should set out her report and what content to include.

3.  If Linda is to present her recommendations in an oral presentation, describe how she can ensure her message is clearly and effectively received.

4.  Describe one way that Linda could encourage her team members to implement the changes to customer service procedures.
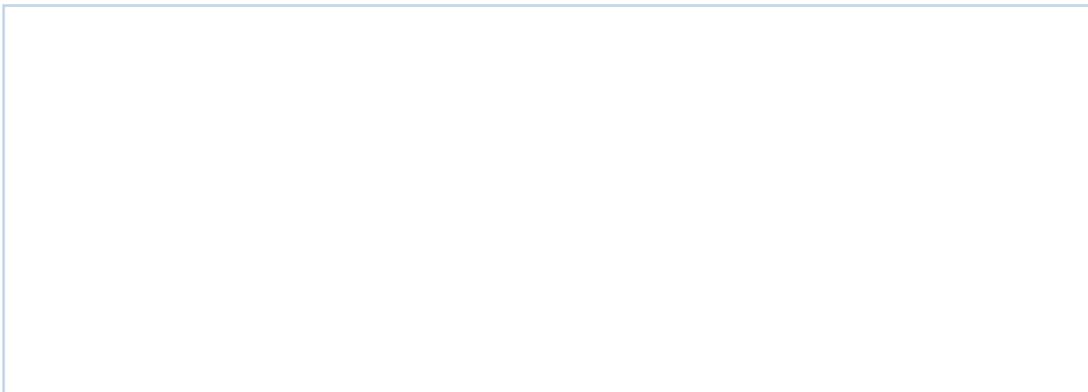
5.  Describe two ways that Linda could collaborate with her team members to achieve joint outcomes.
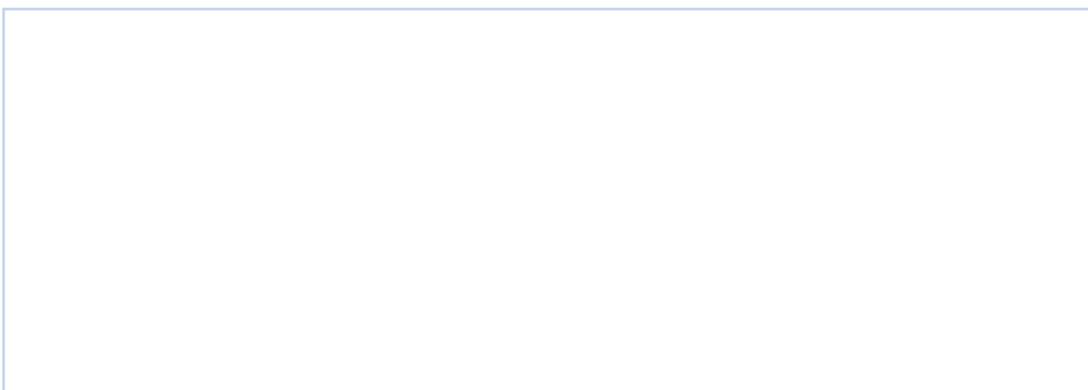
# Topic 3
# Implement team customer service standards

Team customer service standards promote teamwork, encourage the effective transmission of information and ensure team members work collaboratively to manage the quality of the team's service delivery.

Standards are a way to ensure a team efficiently and effectively completes work-related activities to achieve organisational objectives. Team standards relating to decision-making, communication, conflict resolution and recognition of protocols impose accountability and values that are unique to the customer service team.

In this topic you will learn how to:

3A    Plan and implement team and work activities, and identify resources to meet customer needs and expectations

# 3A Plan and implement team and work activities, and identify resources to meet customer needs and expectations

Your role as team leader is to stimulate communication between team members and encourage them to participate in and be responsible for all team activities, not only their own work tasks. Planning and implementing team and work activities to meet customer needs and expectations, and minimise inconvenience, build team cohesion and improve the overall customer experience at the same time.



Identify the resources required to undertake team tasks while meeting required customer service levels. Hiring additional staff, implementing new systems, purchasing contemporary technology or undertaking a training program all cost time and money and should be carefully considered to ensure the activities add value to the organisation.

## Definition of a team

A team involves several people working together to achieve a common goal. Within a team, people work interdependently, communicate frequently and see themselves as part of a specific group.

However, a group of employees is not a team just because they work in the same area or on the same shift. Teamwork is characterised by a combined effort and focus, while individuals who happen to work within a group focus on their own efforts and goals. An effective team relies on all members taking responsibility for its success.

Successful teams need effective leaders. One of your major responsibilities is to promote the effectiveness of your customer service team by implementing team and work activities that meet customer needs and expectations.

Characteristics of a successful team are:

- Team works well together
- Team members have respect for each other
- They learn from each other's experiences and skills
- The team contributes in a positive way to setting standards, planning, implementation and measurement
- It proactively looks at better ways of doing things
- It shares information and ideas
- It promotes team goals

## Customer service teams

An organisation's customer service team is often the first personal contact that a customer has with the business. This point of contact establishes your organisation's image in the mind of your customers.

Properly setting up your customer service team is a critical step that affects many other aspects of your business operation. A well-functioning team can mean the difference between success and failure.

Here are some elements to consider when forming a customer service team.

| Elements of a customer service team |
| --- |

**Customer needs**

Understand the needs of your customer: survey your customer base to define the common issues that need to be regularly addressed by your customer service team. Categorise these areas to see whether they can handled by the whole team or separate service divisions are required. If you have significant volume in issues such as sales assistance, technical support or product usage, you may need to split your customer service team into components and allocate activities and resources accordingly.

**Team standards**

Design your customer service model to reflect your organisation's ethical and social culture, as well as your recognised duty to your customers. Develop and implement team customer service standards, such as prompt knowledge and courteous advice, attentive and clear consumer relations, and accessible service and support options.

**Team objectives**

Develop team goals, objectives and KPIs to gauge the effectiveness of your customer service team. You need to frequently review and provide your team members with regular feedback regarding their individual and team performance, with suggestions on how to improve service delivery. Ensure goals, objectives and KPIs are relevant to your customer base and industry type.

**Team training**

Equip your customer service team with the tools and knowledge it needs to adequately meet customer needs and expectations. Conduct on-the-job training or include team members in professional development activities. Make sure your team has access to the equipment and technology needed to complete team and work activities, such as computers, phone systems, internet connectivity, adequate lighting, product or service manuals, and telephone scripts.

**Team building**

Team-building activities help develop trust among team members, which is crucial when teamwork is required on a daily basis to achieve objectives and service delivery standards. Mutual trust created by team-building activities allows your team members to depend more on each another and be more productive and efficient. Team-building activities can also ease conflicts between team members by allowing them to bond and become more accustomed to each other's personalities.



**Team communication**

Team communication skills are critical for ensuring the success of your team. Strong team communication skills help build relationships, ensure the sharing of new ideas and best practices, and benefit team members through coaching and mentoring. The cohesiveness of your team depends on strong relationships among team members. Communication is driven by managers who work with their team to establish communication processes that bring the team together to accomplish its goals.

# Team customer service standards

The best performing customer service teams are those where the leader develops and implements standards based on the measures that contribute to the team's performance. Team customer service standards not only guide the day-to-day behaviour of team members, but also serve as a basis for team performance reviews. Team standards influence team decisions and the implementation of corrective actions and improvements to service delivery.

When developing and implementing team customer service standards, it is important to consider how excellence can be defined. You must consider the number of standards that are needed, budget and safety issues, as well as legislative or regulatory requirements. Each team standard should be measurable, objective and documented.

Different types of team customer service standards can include the following.

| Quality standards |
|---|
| Quality standards describe to what standard the customer service team should perform its work or how effective service delivery must be in the performance of its function. |
| **Quantity standards** |
| Quantity standards specify the quantity of work a customer service team must produce or the quantity that must be error-free. |

| **Time-based standards** |
| --- |
| A team standard may state the date by which the customer service team must complete particular activities. |

| **Cost-based standards** |
| --- |
| A team standard may require a reduction in costs or a decrease in waste during a service delivery process or period, by a certain percentage. |

## Team activities

You are responsible for planning and implementing team activities and tasks so that the team complies with the customer service systems and standards, and continues to meet customer needs and expectations.

Here are some different customer service team activities.

| **Complaint handling** |
| --- |
| Customer service teams receive, handle and resolve customer complaints in accordance with organisational guidelines. <br><br> Team activities may include: <br> • sending customers replacement products <br> • reversing erroneous fees <br> • recording returned items. |

| **Sales assistance** |
| --- |
| Customer service teams may be responsible for selling the organisation's products or services in addition to, or in the absence of, a designated sales division. <br><br> Team activities may include: <br> • providing information on products or services <br> • assisting customers to make a decision to buy <br> • helping to generate sales leads. |

### Administrative tasks

Customer service teams may have administrative responsibilities such as:

- transferring telephone calls
- taking and passing on messages
- booking meeting rooms
- scheduling team meetings
- producing team schedules or rosters
- maintaining customer accounts
- filing documents
- completing paperwork.

### Team-specific tasks

The duties and responsibilities of customer service teams will vary depending on the type of organisation and industry. For example:

- Customer service teams in communications and utility companies may be responsible for assisting customers who have an outage or other service problems.
- Customer service teams in online shopping businesses may be responsible for promotional activities, record keeping, arranging delivery and handling complaints.

### Business development

Customer service teams may be responsible for consciously seeking out opportunities for revenue generation. For example, while speaking to a customer on a service-related issue, customer service team members should upsell to the customer by offering them products or services that complement those they have already purchased. In addition, customer service teams should actively listen to their customers for clues given during the conversation that may indicate a future need.

### Customer records

Customer service teams are responsible for collecting all relevant customer data. Customer data is very important, as it can be used by other divisions to achieve organisational objectives.

Data may include:

- contact information
- credit card or billing information
- detailed notes regarding the customer's purchase history
- other personal information.

# Work activities

Customer service teams are responsible for acting as a liaison between customers and the organisation. Team members assist with complaints, orders, errors, account questions, billing, cancellations and other queries relating to service delivery.

In addition to their specific daily work tasks, team members may also be given non-routine work tasks that are critical to meeting customer needs and expectations, and help achieve wider organisational goals; for example, they may be asked to run a brief information session for new team members. They may need extra training to be able to complete these non-routine tasks satisfactorily.

Customer service managers must plan a range of routine and non-routine tasks and implement actions in accordance with the plan to meet desired outcomes. Planning should incorporate the work activities, customer service standards, desired performance levels and resources required to complete tasks.

Here is more about routine and non-routine work tasks.

Routine work tasks include:
- answering inbound telephone calls
- handling customer complaints
- assisting with placement of orders, refunds or exchanges
- advising on organisational policies
- taking payment information
- offering solutions to product or service-related issues.

Non-routine work tasks include:
- organising rosters or schedules
- generating sales leads
- managing team resources
- completing sales paperwork
- compiling reports on overall customer satisfaction
- participating in professional development activities.

# Team communication

Information communicated to your team members must be in context, accurate, timely and presented in a way that makes it easy to understand and act on, if action is needed.

Clearly articulate customer service systems and standards in a team environment, using language suitable to diverse audiences, and use listening and questioning techniques to confirm your team members' understanding.

Here are some strategies for effective team communication.

**Internal communication**

Internal communication strategies can be used to motivate, reprimand or inform customer service team members. Examples of internal communication methods are emails, instant messaging, phone calls, memos and live online chat. For example, you may send out a group email explaining a new team customer service standard and attach a copy of the relevant policy document to the email.

**External communication**

There are many methods of external workplace communication, including websites, advertising, marketing campaigns and social media. External communication not only serves customers, but can also be used to place inventory orders with suppliers, research your competition, generate potential customer leads or improve customer service systems.

**Face-to-face**

Face-to-face communication is a personal and effective channel for verbal exchange and the sharing of ideas and information. You may choose to use face-to-face internal communication for customer service team training, promotions, team performance reviews or weekly team meetings. Group meetings allow team members to ask questions, raise concerns or confirm their understanding of the meeting's content.

## Cross-cultural communication

Your organisation's customers and your customer service team probably include people from cultures different to yours. It takes special skills for managers to communicate across diverse audiences. People respond to courtesy and feel comfortable when they know you respect them. This helps them to be open and willing to ask questions when they don't understand something.

By making your internal or external customers feel comfortable, you assist them to be better listeners and understand the information you are trying to convey. Request feedback from the group to ascertain how the information has been received and understood.

Here is a list of skills to use when communicating with people from other cultures.

**Effective communication skills for cross-cultural diversity**

Speak clearly and concisely, make eye contact (if culturally acceptable) and enunciate plainly. Avoid using ambiguous or dual-meaning words.

Keep your message simple. Speak to your audience's level of understanding and allow listeners time to clarify what you have said.

Maintain respect and courtesy for people who come from different cultures. This helps reduce the stress they may feel when trying to understand what you are saying.

Smile and be open. Use body language that communicates your acceptance and respect for your listeners. Avoid large gestures with your hands or crossing your arms.

Avoid slang, colloquial language or humour that are unique to individual cultures and not always interpreted correctly.

Avoid using negative questions or answers. Double negatives can be confusing to those who speak English as their second language.

# Minimise customer inconvenience

Inconveniencing customers has consequences. Having uninformed and inexperienced customer service representatives, unreturned calls, disorganised call centre escalation, repetition of information multiple times, or recording of incorrect delivery details all harm your organisation's brand and send customers to your competitors.

As consumers grow more accustomed to the convenience of online shopping and e-commerce, it is crucial that you and your customer service team carry out all work and team activities efficiently and effectively to minimise any inconvenience to customers.

Regularly measure and attempt to reduce customer effort and find ways to improve each interaction.

Here is more about how to minimise customer inconvenience.

| **Practical steps for minimising customer inconvenience** |
|---|
| • Make phone, internet and mobile self-service efficient, productive and satisfying |
| • Make an effort to understand the context of a customer's inquiry |
| • Ensure vital information, tools and resources are readily available to team members that equip them to provide exemplary service |
| • Train and develop friendly, engaging and personable customer service representatives |
| • Keep any promises made to customers, such as follow-up, to create a meaningful, lasting impression |
| • Be proactive by notifying customers of potential issues and providing them with ways to take fast, simple action |

# Identify required resources

One of the key areas in improving customer service performance is to allocate resources to staff training and development; for example, training team members in the use of new technologies and training for team members who train others.

Budgetary resources should also be allocated to staffing, such as increasing staffing levels in order to reduce the amount of time customers wait for service, providing more time for staff to prepare advertising material and rostering team members to cater for increased opening hours.

Here are some ways that allocating resources intelligently can improve customer service.

## Ways allocating resources intelligently can improve customer service

**1**

**Policies and procedures**
- Develop a more flexible returns policy.
- Develop a more efficient system for handling customer complaints.

**2**

**New fixtures and fittings**
- Install a wheelchair ramp to provide access for customers with a disability.
- Install a new waiting lounge so customers can wait for orders in comfort.

**3**

**Stationery**
- Print new forms to reflect procedural changes (such as feedback forms).
- Print improved promotional material to advertise new service levels.

**4**

**Advertising**
- Send mailouts to customers with surveys, newsletters and advice regarding new products.
- Set up a website to give customers another means of contact.
- Develop and print brochures to improve customer knowledge of products

**5**

**Computer software or equipment**
- Ensure equipment is kept operational to ensure effective service delivery.
- Purchase scanning equipment and new registers to improve the accuracy and speed of point-of-sale transactions.

**6**

**Safety standards**
- Fix broken floor tiles.
- Install improved floor plans showing exit routes.

<table>
<tr><td>**7**</td><td>**Facilities**
- Develop child-minding facilities.
- Improve lighting, thermal settings and toilets.</td></tr>
</table>

<table>
<tr><td>**8**</td><td>**Customer and employee incentives**
- Set up a customer rewards program.
- Start team member awards for delivery of excellent customer service.</td></tr>
</table>

# Budgetary limitations

The structure and limitations of budgets can have an impact on the implementation of customer service systems and how team activities are completed.

For example, your organisation may wish to improve the way it handles incoming customer calls promptly by installing new computer-based telephone equipment and sophisticated computerised answering services. However, the cost may far exceed the amount allocated in the budget.

For recommendations to be realistic and achievable, you must take budgetary considerations into account.

Here are some examples of taking budgetary considerations into account.



**Time**
- Reduce unproductive travel time by using videoconferencing to hold meetings or training sessions. Time saved on travelling can be better spent on more productive activities.
- Outsource IT tasks to a managed service provider that has the expertise your team members may lack.



**Personnel**
- Create specialised roles within your team and allow staff to focus their skills in one area to improve productivity.
- Create a standardised approach to customer management, allowing your organisation to maintain a high level of individualised support with less effort.
- Integrate your software to minimise the time spent handling data and maximise the time spent servicing customers.

**Technology**

- Consider developing a long-term technology plan so that whenever you replace hardware that has become obsolete or ineffective, you minimise or eliminate disruption to work activities by carefully determining short-term and long-term business objectives and mapping technology solutions to those objectives.

**Equipment**

- Consider allocating resources towards a communications solution that enables your customer service team to have one phone number that simultaneously rings on multiple devices. Team members could access their entire communications system wherever they are and check email, voice mail and online inquiries all in the one place.

**Environment/facilities**

- Seek team members' suggestions for reducing noise or redesigning the workplace layout to promote interaction between team members. Their ideas may be innovative and cost efficient, and something you have not thought of.
- Seek more efficient storage solutions.

**Access to information**

- Systems do not have to be elaborate as long as they provide your team members with secure, consistent access to information.
- Implement secure and reliable network infrastructure to provide the necessary foundation for a range of efficiency-enhancing technologies and solutions.

## Example: plan team and work activities

Jonathon is the customer service manager at a small telecommunications company. He is responsible for managing a team of ten customer service representatives. His customer service team is not only responsible for receiving inbound customer service calls and handling customer complaints, but must also spend time assisting the sales team to generate leads, handle inbound sales calls, make follow-up calls and carry out business development activities.

The team members have come to Jonathon to express concerns about their workload. They are worried that the excessive amount of team and work activities that have been given to them is detracting from their ability to meet customer needs and expectations. Customers have begun to complain about inconvenience caused to them by lengthy call wait times and failure to follow up on inquiries.

Jonathon approaches senior management to request the engagement of two new team members, but due to budgetary constraints his request is denied. Instead, he decides to plan work activities and allocate the human resources he already has in a way that will meet required customer service levels.

Jonathon meets with the customer service team to plan its work activities and create specialised roles that allow team members to rotate between responsibilities and focus their skills on one particular area at a time. This makes the customer service team more efficient and productive, and increases customer satisfaction levels in the long run.

v1662

## Practice task 7

Read the case study, then answer the questions that follow.

### Case study

Rowena is the customer service manager at a privately owned freight and logistics provider that offers a comprehensive range of fast and efficient delivery solutions. The business has a state-of-the-art automated freight sorting terminal, warehouses in most capital cities, modern depots in major regional centres, and an extensive pick-up and delivery fleet. The customer service team is fully equipped and resourced to meet required customer service levels most of the time.

During the month of December, the volume of customer service requests increases by 50 per cent. Rowena's team members are inundated with inbound customer service calls, order processing, sending of email confirmations and tracking of deliveries. An influx of customer complaints is occurring due to lengthy call wait times, unanswered email inquiries, missing or delayed parcels, and the receipt of inaccurate delivery confirmations.

*... continued*

1. Describe two ways that Rowena could plan and implement team and work activities to meet customer needs and expectations during peak activity periods.

2. Describe one way that Rowena could minimise customer inconvenience during peak activity periods.

3. Identify two ways that Rowena could identify and allocate resources to effectively undertake team tasks while meeting required customer service levels.

# Summary

1. Team leaders should stimulate communication between team members and encourage them to participate in and be responsible for all team activities, not only their own work tasks.

2. The best performing customer service teams are those where standards (based on the measures that contribute to the team's performance) are developed and implemented.

3. You are responsible for planning and implementing team activities and tasks so that your customer service team implements customer service systems and standards, and continues to meet customer needs and expectations.

4. Information communicated to your team members must be in context, accurate, timely and presented in a way that makes it easy to understand and act on, if action is needed.

5. By making your internal and external customers feel comfortable, you assist them to be better listeners and understand the information you are trying to convey.

6. As consumers grow more accustomed to the convenience of online shopping and e-commerce, it is crucial that you and your customer service team carry out all work and team activities efficiently and effectively to minimise any inconvenience to customers.

7. Allocating resources to technology helps you increase operational efficiency, reduce costs, improve customer satisfaction and stay ahead of your competition.

## Learning checkpoint 3
## Implement team customer service standards

This learning checkpoint allows you to review your skills and knowledge in implementing team customer service standards.

### Part A

1. Describe the purpose of team customer service standards.

2. Describe two examples of routine work tasks and two examples of non-routine work tasks carried out by customer service teams.

3. Explain why it is important to use language suitable to diverse audiences.

4. Describe a team communication strategy used for articulating systems and standards that employs listening and questioning techniques to confirm understanding.

5. Explain why it is important to minimise customer inconvenience.

6. Identify two types of resources required to undertake team tasks while meeting required customer service levels.

# Part B

Read the scenario, then answer the questions that follow.

**Scenario**

You are the customer service call centre manager at a large computer manufacturing company. The team you manage is responsible for handling inbound customer support telephone calls and responding to customer support queries submitted online. The customer support call centre operates from Monday to Friday between the hours of 7.00 am and 7.00 pm. The call centre is severely under-resourced and a recent influx of customer complaints demonstrates to you that your team is unable to meet customer needs and expectations. The results of a customer satisfaction survey identifies that customers are most frustrated by failure to reach a solution after their first support inquiry is made and they often have to follow up with customer support staff themselves.

1. Identify and describe three routine work activities that your customer support team is responsible for.

2. Give three reasons that your team's service delivery is causing inconvenience to your customers.

3. Describe how you could plan team and work activities to meet customer needs and expectations, and minimise customer inconvenience.