

CARRIERS CORNER



by John Costanzo

Do Your Logistics Partners Value Customer Service?

The most dreaded phrase in the English language just might be: "Please hold for the next available operator." Good customer service experiences have become few and far between, with more companies either entrusting their customer outreach to computerized voice-prompted systems, or worse, outsourcing to call centers that have little knowledge about the companies they represent.

Businesses in the market for a third-party service provider should include customer service in their selection criteria. Choosing a logistics provider involves entrusting your shipments—and your customers—to a company that claims it can deliver your goods on time and cost efficiently. One breakdown in the process can have costly, time-consuming, and reputation-shattering consequences for your business.

When it comes to customer service, there are vast differences among logistics providers. Good logistics providers will:

- Check in with you regularly about new developments in your business and fill you in on their new services.
- Understand—and even anticipate—your business needs, and be a good source of solutions and options for your transportation challenges.
- Offer creative solutions to help you better serve your customers.

■ Give you the same level of service as an established customer as they did when courting your business.

If providers work to build strong relationships with you, you'll feel more comfortable trusting them with your customers' needs.

WHO YOU GONNA CALL?

Many logistics providers make the mistake of investing in customer service technology tools as a way to reduce headcount and other costs. If you bristle when you get an automated response, you're not alone.

Fifty-eight percent of respondents to a 2006 survey by Accenture global business consultants were "not at all satisfied" with automated telephone customer service, while 85 percent indicated some degree of satisfaction with live customer service over the phone. Make sure you can address concerns with a member of your prospective partner's customer service department when you need to.

But just getting an operator on the line isn't enough. Be wary of providers who bounce your call to multiple operators, and customer service agents who have little to no expertise in the subject areas for which they are receiving calls. These are signs that customer service isn't up to par. When you call your provider's customer service department,

they should deal with your issue professionally, accurately, and quickly.

While automation has greatly improved the industry's ability to track packages, schedule pick-ups, and oversee billing, a computer simply cannot replace some functions. It cannot reroute a shipment at the 11th hour, intercept a mislabeled pallet before it reaches the border, or understand the unique needs of a particular shipment. Only customer service agents can do that, and logistics providers who fail to see this are doing you a disservice.

The resources a logistics provider puts into its customer service efforts are immediately apparent. A provider who values its customers, wants to exceed expectations, and is committed to being in the game for the long term understands that quality customer service costs money, and needs to be nurtured.

Businesses have an interest in ensuring that their logistics provider is committed to consistently available customer service. Logistics providers ignore customer service at their own peril because, believe me, shippers will notice. ■


Where business is going