

Service teams rise to the c

New research from managed services company Maintel has found that more than a third of people (38.6%) in total, admit to losing their temper with customer service agents and 26% of Brits aged 18-24 and 25-34 admit to swearing at them.

Meanwhile, 44.4 per cent of customers have hung up in frustration and 53.9% have asked to speak to a manager. The research was conducted during lockdown and explored the experiences of 200 people with customer services teams and contact centres, They were asked how they would prefer to get in touch, whether their experience has been good and where their frustrations lie.

In a bigger study, global workplace performance firm Leesman surveyed 700,000 workers worldwide to find that 52% have little or no experience working from home. The research also concludes that the UK is one of the world's 'least prepared countries to weather a mass home-working strategy', with 55% of its workers having little/no experience.

With the coronavirus pandemic forcing large numbers of staff to work remotely, customer service leaders must ensure that their teams remain engaged, healthy, effective, and productive in their new working environment, despite having to manage them remotely. So what skills are required, and what best practices need to be followed?

The theme of last month's Customer Service Week reflected the importance of teamwork in providing outstanding service to all customers. This all led to some key questions for our service leader contributors this month: During the Covid-19 pandemic, how have members of your customer service team embraced your new work arrangements, how are they striving for excellence, how are they adapting to change and what, if any, challenges have they overcome?



VICKI COWPERTHWAIT
9 GROUP

"We've been keen to respond to our partners' changing priorities, as most businesses have had to adjust the way they work. We observed a reduction in inbound calls and an increase in cases raised through our support portals. We responded by working closely with our development team to facilitate portal enhancements. We've strengthened our processes, equipping individuals to provide a consistently excellent service against a changing backdrop. Collaboration and cross departmental working have increased, and our teams are equipped to respond to the changing needs of our partners. A new operational support group has also been established, enabling staff to easily communicate with a wide group outside their own team, regardless of where they are working from. We also hold open conversations with partners, so that we can clearly understand their current priorities. We're currently running a questionnaire which aims to identify how their needs have changed since the pandemic began."



MALEK RAHIMI
BDR

"BDR invested a significant amount of resource creating a seamless operation for homeworking ensuring the latest technology is available for support staff in whatever environment, by offering a blend of voice and video communication maximising efficiency when assisting customers. We utilise Power BI for live statistics on performance behaviours such as calls, emails, tickets and jobs handled by each agent so we could divert additional help to the right areas, reducing stress where possible. We also provide tutorial videos for repetitive tasks, saving time. We implemented shift patterns in three of our support divisions to accommodate customers new work patterns. Most of our staff have adapted well due to the fast-paced nature of our group, whilst a few require additional help with the transition and increased workloads. Overall, we are feeling positive going forward with relative harmony."



PATRICIA FARRELL
GAMMA

"At Gamma, our key focus has always been to deliver our objectives and strategy as planned, regardless of the current crisis. Prior to the first national lockdown, we decided to shift to home working to protect our people's health and wellbeing, and to continue delivering our services as seamlessly as possible. This early decision was only made possible by the technology we already had in place well before 2020. Over six-months into the pandemic, we are continuing to support our customer service team by listening to their needs and reacting accordingly. Striking a work-life balance has been especially difficult for some of our colleagues, but we've overcome this challenge by encouraging alternative working hours to accommodate family and childcare needs where necessary. Ultimately, our collaborative culture and flexible approach have made it possible for our customer service team to continue delivering the best possible service to our partners and customers."



DAN MILES
FIDELITY GROUP

"Pre the COVID Pandemic "Home Working" was for the lucky few. However, working from home and being isolated can be a lonely experience. A good customer service team thrives in a fast paced, collaborative environment. I am used to questions flying here and there, shouted across the office. Frustration, usually at carriers, boiling over and the support the togetherness brings. The intoxicating team spirit! To overcome this, we have twice daily video conference calls to review sticky issues and listen to each other's stories. Originally these were just audio conference calls but we soon found that the visual element provided a turbo charger to the calls. Facial expressions and eye to eye contact adds a huge amount of personal interaction to distance communication, which cannot be underestimated. Oddly, I also miss the unwinding on the journey home, a quite interlude between work life and home life."



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challenge of home working



KATRINA MACLEOD
HIGHNET

"The move to fully home working, and then a blended approach when we were able to offer some office-based working, has been very well received by our teams. People have embraced the opportunities and flexibility available to them. However, WFH is easier for some than it is for others, and our middle management have had to learn how best to support the health and wellbeing of their team. We've put a lot of effort into raising awareness, educating and empowering our people to provide this support to the very best of their ability. We also have to manage productivity and the customer experience, and this isn't easy when people are dispersed. We've been very attentive to our Customer Satisfaction surveys, and we're monitoring our Net Promoter Score results very closely. It's been great to see higher scores and great customer comments since March – home and blended working works!"



DUNCAN WARD
NETWORK TELECOM

"At Network Telecom we worked quickly to get customers set up for remote working, many for the first time. Our customer service team acted with urgency from their own homes, providing businesses with equipment like additional mobiles and dongles, as well as upgrading them to the cloud. Our aim was to empower our customers to work from home at short notice and ensure business continuity. We moved to remote installations and remote training, ensuring customers had everything they needed to work remotely. Internally, our teams pulled together with members of other teams joining the customer service team to add additional support. Thanks to our WiFi-enabled desk phones, NT Multimedia, we were able to stay in constant contact. We utilised our video conferencing platform, Enreach Meetings, to keep up team morale throughout. As a result, we were able to uphold top-class customer service despite working completely remotely for the first time."



ROB STEVENS
JOLA

"Due to the services we offer and the equipment we provide for staff, we were quickly able to move to remote working across the business which enabled staff to work safely and adapt to lockdown. With the closure of schools in particular, staff were able to manage their workloads around childcare whilst still exceeding company KPI's and supporting customers. With a small reduction on inbound work in the early months of lockdown, staff were able to take time to review current processes and make changes and improvements to better support customers whilst increasing their knowledge of the products and services they are supporting. More time at home – staying safe – also allowed staff to spend more time with their families and offer support during what has been a challenging time for everyone and help them adapt."



ANNE SHANNON
CITYFIBRE

"After a series of lockdown simulations, all of CityFibre's office-based employees, including our customer service team, were working from home prior to the national lockdown announcement, ensuring they all had full access to the systems and resources needed to efficiently work remotely. We pre-empted the need for collaborative and emotional support during these unprecedented times and established a programme of regular internal communications and utilised our existing team of internal Mental Health First Aiders to support staff. Ensuring the well-being of our colleagues is a top priority and one of our noted challenges since working from home."



CHRIS MORRISEY
LILY COMMS

"I couldn't be prouder of how our customer services team has stepped up during this pandemic. The volume of calls we received initially were unprecedented, all at a time where our team were adjusting to remote working, something they previously had no experience in. The team straight away adopted a can-do attitude and demonstrated great empathy for our clients, providing support when it was really needed. We helped our teams to adapt by delivering specific 'Working from Home' training, which really helped our people to understand how they could deliver their role from home and what our expectations were as a business. All through making these adjustments, our call volumes were higher than ever as our customers equally needed our support in adapting to work from home, so we made it our mission to contact all of our clients to discuss how we could help to minimise disruption."



DAVID SAMPSON
VIRTUAL1

"Whilst you can't replace face-to-face interactions for building relationships, using the latest technology and the bonds already created, the transition to remote working within Virtual1 has been seamless. Our customer services team has done a phenomenal job supporting each other both through video conferencing and chat to stay ultra-connected. Our real-time NPS system has also been a great asset in helping us respond to customer concerns immediately. We monitor progress until satisfaction is restored and, during the pandemic, our Net Promoter Score has actually increased by 20 points. The main challenge we've had is the local lockdowns as our people need their support networks. Knowing this, we have made extra effort to stay close to our teams, ensuring daily contact and making them aware of the mental health support we have available. We also continue to host virtual socials to facilitate the relationship building that we believe is so critical."



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