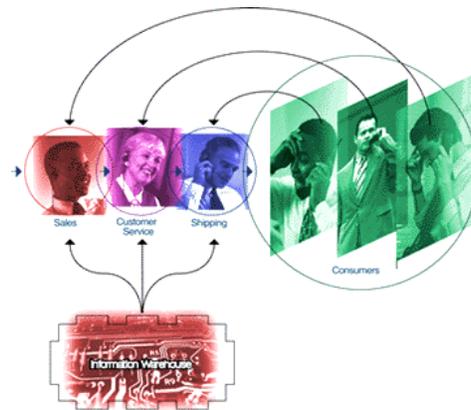


## One Face to the Customer



"I'm sorry that's not my department." This phrase is too often heard by today's customers. The customer service representative is often forced to give this answer, however, because they don't have the training or information to respond quickly and properly. But, with the today's sophisticated customer response systems and the proper training, customer service representatives can significantly increase customer satisfaction with reduced activity costs.

The customer service department, a critical and highly visible function of most companies, can readily benefit from the application of a process-oriented holistic approach. With the ultimate goal of efficiently and profitably delivering product to the customer, a holistic approach requires the efficient integration of information, people and resources along the supply chain.

Applying this process-oriented, holistic approach to the customer service function means the creation of "one face to the customer." Customers are no longer transferred from one person or department to another to get an answer. Separate operations, such as sales, distribution and shipping, are linked to customer service to create a comprehensive bank of knowledge about each customer accessible to the representative handling the customer inquiry. Customers inquiring on the status of an order or reporting a problem receive consistent, efficient service.

Customer inquiries of pricing, product availability, order status and deduction resolution can be accurately answered by anyone who picks up the

phone. Whomever first speaks to the customer has a customer profile, access to the required information and the skills to be able to handle the inquiry. The customer is not forced to remember who, what department or what number to call depending on the subject – they always call the customer service department. The customer never hears "that's not my department."

Companies employing the concept of "one face to the customer" must adopt a process approach to customer service – from the initial product offerings and sales programs presented to the customer, through the receipt of a purchase order and the order fulfillment cycle, to any inquiries or post-shipment deduction resolution. All participants must view their activities not as the performance of individual tasks, but as part of a team process with the objective of getting the right product to the customer at the right time and at the right price.

*One face to the customer means... the customer never hears "that's not my department."*

With enterprise-wide systems, all associates with customer contact, be they customer service, sales or logistics, can have access to a common knowledge-base of customer information and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). This leverages the information across all functions and provides the frontline sales

force with the perspective they need for more effective customer calls.

From our experience, providing the customer with broad-based and consistent information on demand requires a reengineering of the existing information infrastructure. They need a history of the prior communication with the customer, so they are aware of commitments which have been made. They are cross-trained and multi-functional so they can speak intelligently outside of their area of prime expertise. Members of the team have frequent communication regarding the customer and his orders.

Additionally, the company must adopt a proactive approach to order management, identifying and remedying possible service issues before the issue becomes a problem. More systemic issues are identified through the analysis of invoice deductions to determine the root causes, with the subsequent implementation of policy and procedural changes in the process to prevent their reoccurrence.

"One face to the customer" creates a competitive edge for suppliers by generating increased customer satisfaction and future sales. This streamlined approach to customer service reduces errors and opportunities for miscommunication. Service effectiveness is enhanced as the customer service representative becomes the customer's advocate, acutely aware of both customer requirements and the history of an issue. Customer service representatives make better business decisions as they gain awareness of the implications of their activities. Redundant and non-value-added calls between departments are eliminated, freeing resources for more productive activity.

*Providing the customer with broad-based and consistent information on demand requires a re-engineering of the existing information infrastructure.*

Customer service representatives gain increased job satisfaction through ownership of the entire service process, rather than performing isolated clerical tasks. In many companies, a career path progressing from customer service representative to sales representative is identified.

More importantly, the holistic approach of "one face to the customer" creates added-value by providing customers with an efficient, effective and responsive front.