

# CUSTOMER SERVICE & SUPPORT **BEST PRACTICES**



## **CMLS BEST PRACTICES GUIDE FOR THE MLS**

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CMLS Best Practices bring together emerging and proven practices from across real estate to align and advance professional standards within the MLS industry.

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# CMLS Best Practices

## OVERVIEW

"Customer service is a series of activities designed to enhance the level of customer satisfaction – that is, the feeling that a product or service has met the customer expectation." <sup>1</sup> Any organization that has the word "service" in its name should, by any measure, have a service-oriented approach to its customers.

To deliver a phenomenal customer experience and achieve the highest levels of satisfaction, the concept must be embedded in the culture of the organization. Customer service should be the focus of every customer interaction – from phone reception to website navigation to classroom instruction. Even the more challenging parts of the business, such as fee collection, compliance management, and service interruptions (due to non-payment) are touch points. These are opportunities to enhance the perception of the MLS through great service to the customer. Every customer touch point, throughout the organization, is important and should be considered as part of the customer experience.

These are interesting times for contact centers. As the rise of the Internet, mobile Internet, and social networks come together, contact centers find themselves dealing with new methods for reaching their customers.

## CUSTOMER SERVICE PHILOSOPHY

Many customer service mantras have been repeated over the years, but two general philosophies bear repeating. Nordstrom<sup>2</sup> began business in 1901 with one sentence in its employee manual: "Rule #1: Use your good judgment in all situations. There will be no additional rules." In years that followed it added more HR language, but that philosophy served them well. In the best seller<sup>3</sup> on Nordstrom culture, businesses are encouraged to remove barriers and restrictions so employees are empowered to provide excellent customer service. Employees who are unencumbered by the shackles of too many rules, too many regulations, too much paperwork, and overly restricted communication channels will be free to truly focus on the customer and provide excellent customer service.

MLSs are sometimes dinosaurs of bureaucracy. The longer they have been in business the more rules, policies, and regulations they have accumulated. MLSs should make sure their rules are not barriers to customer service excellence. You should review the employee handbook regularly and throw out unnecessary rules that impede good customer service. Employees can explain where the bottlenecks are and how to get rid of them. You should maintain an open and honest dialogue with staff about how your organization can become better in serving the customer. Consider regularly asking front line staff to submit ideas to improve the customer experience, something as simple as offering a gift card for ideas that end up being implemented drives amazing suggestions from staff.

One last point on the philosophy of customer service. It is not sufficient to draft an excellent service manual, hand it to your staff or service manager, and expect results. A customer-oriented company should develop a culture of service and an attitude that permeates the entire organization from the top down as well as the bottom up. It is vitally important for the CEO to demonstrate a genuine concern and desire to provide excellent customer service. The CEO who is in the field helping customers, identifying customer needs, and offering solutions, is the CEO who operates an MLS with exemplary customer service.

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<sup>1</sup> Turban, Efraim (2002). *Electronic Commerce: A Managerial Perspective*. Prentice Hall. ISBN 0-13-185461-5.

<sup>2</sup> Spector, Robert and Patrick D. McCarthy, 1995. *The Nordstrom Way, The Inside Story of America's #1 Customer Service Company*, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Canada.

<sup>3</sup> Whiteley Richard, C., 1991. *The Customer Driven Company, Moving From Talk to Action*, Addison-Wesley, Reading, MA.

Southwest Airlines founder Herb Kelleher<sup>4</sup> is a shining example when he says, "Treat employees with care and concern if that is the way you want them to treat each other and your customers." He goes on to say that part of the success of Southwest Airlines is his personal philosophy, "Make sure that good enough is never good enough."

### Best Practices: Philosophy

- Empower employees to use good judgment in all situations
  - Good service is an attitude, not a policy manual
- Review and revise the service handbook regularly and throw out unnecessary rules
- CEO must practice what policy preaches: treat employees as they would customers
- Bring employees and customers together frequently to identify problems and develop solutions
- Create an environment of cooperation that continuously improves customer service

### Culture

Often a company's success thrives on a culture where every employee operates by a shared set of values. These values can then be used to guide decisions and actions, and every employee can be coached to uphold these values.

Does your organization have a mission, a purpose, a reason for being?

- A good mission statement should accurately explain why the organization exists and what it hopes to achieve in the future. It articulates the organization's essential nature, its values, and its work.
- It must resonate with the people working in and for the organization, as well as the different constituencies the organization hopes to affect.
- It must express the organization's purpose in a way that inspires commitment, innovation, and courage.
- To get started, list words, phrases, or ideas that come to mind (with respect to the organization and these categories). Look for language and concepts that enjoy broad consensus.

A mission statement should answer three questions:

1. What are the opportunities or needs that we exist to address? (The purpose of the organization.)
2. What are we doing to address these needs? (The business of the organization.)
3. What principles or beliefs guide our work? (The values of the organization.)

The phrase "big hairy audacious goal" (or BHAG) was first proposed by James Collins and Jerry Porras in their 1994 book "Built to Last." They say a BHAG is "clear and compelling and serves as a unifying focal point of effort, often creating immense team spirit. It has a clear finish line, so the organization can know when it has achieved the goal. A BHAG should not be a sure bet, but the organization must believe 'we can do it anyway.'"

Microsoft came up with probably the most well-known BHAG, "A computer on every desk and in every home, all running Microsoft software." Amazon has a great one for its Kindle, too: "Every book ever printed, in any language, all available in less than 60 seconds." Both statements achieve something crucial; they quantify the goal. Microsoft doesn't just want to sell software; it wants its software on every computer and in every home. Amazon doesn't just want you to buy a book; it wants to help you do so in less than one minute.

<sup>4</sup> Freiberg, Kevin and Jackie Freiberg, 1996. *Nuts! Southwest Airlines' Crazy Recipe for Business and Personal Success*, Bard Press, Inc., Austin, TX

## Customers Versus Stakeholders

Customer service extends beyond just the subscriber and director.

There are others who are affected by the actions and policies of the MLS beyond just those engaged in brokerage and agency. These “stakeholders” include the entire vendor community (those supplying auxiliary products and services to your customers), companies that become involved in the transaction after a sales contract is signed (mortgage, title, insurance, escrow, inspection, appraisal), and by extension, any company with whom your principal customers (brokers and agents) do business.

Every MLS faces challenges in defining its primary customer. The inherent conflict among the brokers who own the businesses, the agents who pay directly for the MLS service, and the owners of the MLS itself (be they brokers, associations, or a hybrid) often have dramatically different goals and objectives. The MLS executive can be caught between competing agendas (e.g., profit for the owners versus lower cost for the users), and must walk a fine line to satisfy all quarters without alienating any.

As you consider your various customer constituents, it is helpful to understand their expectations, why they call for support, and consider strategies to best support each customer division.

The best customer experience typically comes when a company can act as a single seamless entity across the different steps of customer involvement. To do so, a company should first improve the steps that most need improvement and not waste resources on steps that are less important to customers.

It is important to keep one thing in mind: MLS was created by a group of brokers who collectively decided to share their inventory and offer compensation to each other for cooperating in the sale of property. Those brokers created the system, and they can just as easily dismantle it if they are not satisfied with the integration of their business objectives.

## Customers Are Key

Every chance you get to interact with a subscriber or other person interested in the MLS is a chance to make a great impression. Good customer service starts when a new member or subscriber makes first contact.

If your MLS were to operate with only one best practice, this should be it: All decisions, all services, and all products should be based on a customer focus. Do that and your customer service will be excellent. In a customer-centered business, management and employees must remain focused on satisfying the expectations of the customer. In these companies, rewards, recognition, and training are all strategies for providing the energy that drives everything else.

### **Service Best Practices**



## **Objectives**

To meet your goals of customer satisfaction, it is vital that you have a written plan. Without your goal in writing you just have an idea – a dream, not a strategy. A written plan helps to ensure a total organizational culture of excellence. Your mission statement must include a visionary plan that stresses the importance of customer service. The statement does not further the goal of customer service if the MLS cannot clearly identify the customer within its mission. This identification can be particularly tricky for an MLS where multiple stakeholders all vie for top position as the most important customer.

The plan should be developed with input from all employees, with leadership from the CEO. An employee-driven plan ensures buy in from those who are on the front lines of implementation. The plan should have a limited number of goals – no more than five or six – that speak to the direction of the business and its strong emphasis on customer service. Customer service may be incorporated into one of the major goals or it may be inherent, but it should be clearly recognizable in all of the goals. A written plan that makes frequent reference to the goal puts customer service in the forefront of an MLS's business philosophy.

Questions to consider when evaluating your service offering:

- What communication channels are you using for your customers to connect with you?
- How are you leveraging social media to manage your reputation and support your customers?
- How are you using customer intelligence to deliver the right experience to the right customer at the right time?
- How are you integrating various channels within your organization to ensure a consistent support experience for your customer?

It is also critical to solicit and receive customer input. Customers at all levels should be involved in the development of the philosophy. The plan should be reviewed and updated regularly, as customer needs and expectations constantly change in the dynamic real estate industry environment.

Key elements of the customer experience could include:

1. Creating a memorable and consistent customer experience
2. Soliciting customer feedback throughout the relationship
3. Providing customers with information that is core to your value proposition
4. Identifying customer issues and surfacing new opportunities

Communication is fundamental to understanding, whether the situation is positive or challenging. In all communications to your subscribers, it is important to be direct, honest, straightforward, and unambiguous. When trouble occurs and a difficult message must be delivered, don't hide from the customer or cover up a problem. It is always better to address a problem proactively from the outset, explain what happened, and offer a resolution with a realistic timeframe for completion. Experience has shown that glossing over or minimizing a difficult issue will boomerang to later come back to haunt you. Be up front and you won't look back with regret.

## **CUSTOMER INPUT AND FEEDBACK**

It is essential to ask the right questions. This best practice requires that MLSs constantly ask questions, collect, analyze, and use feedback from the customer as a source of continuing adjustment. As the real estate landscape changes, and as broker and agent needs shift, such feedback will allow the MLS to adjust accordingly.

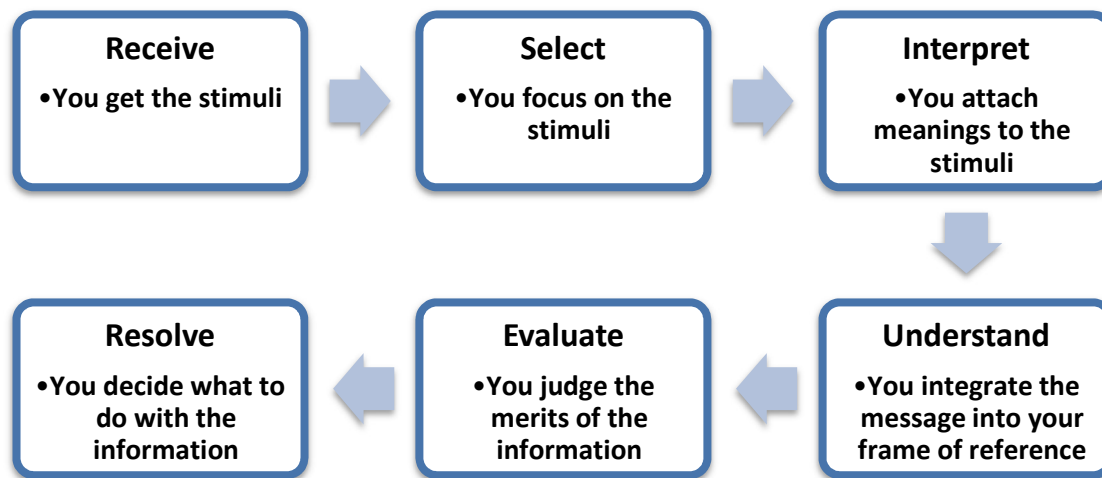
The critical question is, "What do my stakeholders need, and how can we best provide it?" There are many ways to collect such information. Every customer interaction is a potential source of feedback. Everyday conversations with your customers provide a constant flow of useful information.



Each customer service representative (CSR) should be taught the art of asking open-ended questions in order to give the member opportunities to express perceptions, attitudes, and both positive and negative feelings about the quality of service. To make the most of that feedback, CSRs should also be taught the talent of listening.

Listening is something you consciously choose to do. It requires concentration, so the brain can process the sound into meaning. It implies that the meaning of the message will be used, within your frame of reference, to make judgment about the message and to act on it as you see appropriate.

### Effective Listening Requirements



Good listening also requires an environment free from distractions that can interfere with the understanding of the speaker’s message. It requires that the listener withhold judgment about the merits of the message until the speaker is finished. Finally, a good listener often hears what is not being said. They often ask probing, open-ended questions to get to the most critical, but often unspoken, point. Listening skills should be included in your MLS training regimen for any employee who deals directly with your customers.

### Collecting Data

One way to collect data is the use of focus groups. These are small groups of three to seven agents or brokers who focus on a specific topic of interest (you will get different answers to the same question posed to both groups). Focus groups may also be used to propose solutions to problems and resolve critical issues. However, do not call on volunteers who already serve in a leadership or oversight capacity (committee members or directors). They would not be a good source of feedback on policies and practices that they themselves may have had a hand in developing.

Written or emailed surveys are another technique for gathering immediate feedback. Be sure that questions are short and small in number, so as to not waste respondent’s time. A long survey with elaborate answering formats (e.g., rank your feelings on a scale of 1 to 10) will guarantee a low response rate.

Automated phone surveys, which allow surveyors to key in responses, are another useful method of collecting information about customer service and products. Some customer relationship management (CRM) systems will automatically poll a caller immediately after the service call has ended. A simple yes or no answer to the question, “Were you satisfied with the level of service you just received from our help desk?” can do two things. First, it can provide instant feedback and an opportunity to follow up with any caller who says “No.” And secondly, it can show the

caller that you really care about serving your customers well. Both go a long way toward enhancing the subscribers' perception of their MLS.

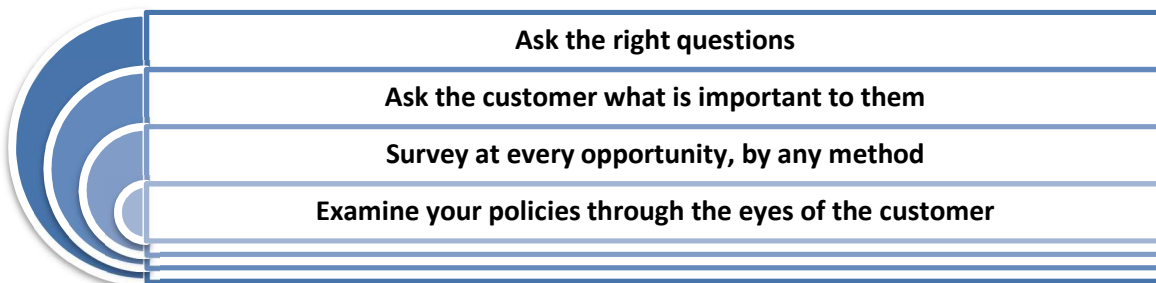
Do you call your own help desk? The secret shopper concept has been around for decades and many businesses have been built on the concept of sending in paid observers to test a store's customer service techniques. You don't have to hire a service for this. Call your own help desk, preferably from a phone number they won't readily identify, and see how fast and courteously the call is answered. Or ask a trusted agent or broker friend to call periodically and give them a scenario or problem you want to test. Often the metrics of your measurement system won't tell the whole story. If you don't record calls (that are reviewed on a regular basis), you will need some other method of knowing how your help desk is doing in real-time, with real customers.

MLSs may choose to have a customer advocate on staff. This is not someone whose only job is defending the customer, but it is a function written into the job description of someone in a position to be involved in the customer support decision process. When discussions are underway, this staffer is charged with making sure the customer's point of view – the contrary position – is given a fair hearing. This is particularly important in the case of a policy development that may not be the most customer friendly. How will the agents react to this policy? You will be better able to handle objections if they are raised internally, before they are voiced by the loyal opposition.

Your customer is your best research department. Listen to them even when it sounds like they don't know what they're talking about. They may just have a hard time explaining the situation because they're so frustrated. (See section on dealing with difficult situations.) Consider posting feedback links throughout your site to provide opportunities for your customers to share their input. Of course, be sure someone is assigned to regularly review and respond to this feedback.

Regardless of the methods used, collection of data is not enough. The results of your polling must be analyzed in depth and used to identify areas for improvement. More importantly, feedback information must be published internally throughout the company (employees and leadership alike), so that all can benefit from it and learn new ways to connect with the customers.

### **Customer Input and Feedback Best Practices**



### **Keeping Track of Information**

It does no good to collect information from all quarters of the organization if you have no organized way to store, retrieve, and report on the data points you have collected. In order to keep track of all the information efficiently, the MLS must have a membership or customer relationship management (CRM) system.

Depending on the size of the MLS, many good CRMs (also called membership management) programs are available that would work very well in the MLS world. Before buying any such package, however, you should talk to at least one or two comparably-sized MLSs that use the software you are considering. If there are none, there is probably a good reason.

A membership management system for smaller organizations could be as simple as a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet or for larger organizations something as sophisticated as a multi-user networked version of Salesforce<sup>5</sup> or Zendesk<sup>6</sup>. A good

<sup>5</sup> Salesforce.com Inc. is a global cloud computing company headquartered in San Francisco, California. It is listed on the New York Stock Exchange and is a component of the S&P 500 Index.



membership system will include some level of process management. However, most MLS administrators will readily admit that their member processing protocol is much different than any standard process. Seldom do off-the-shelf software packages work for an MLS or association without significant modification and customization.

Your CRM system should be capable of being exposed to the membership through the MLS intranet or website. After the new member process is defined and programmed into the system, it can often be automated into a self-service process, which requires only an electronic approval from the managing broker for a new agent to enroll in MLS services.

In addition to new member processing, a good CRM system should also include modules for billing for subscriber fees, compliance fines, online store purchases, training class tickets, and anything else the MLS might be thinking of selling in the future.

A good CRM system will include:

#### Interaction Tracking

Each time a customer sends an email, text message, direct message via social media, attends a class, buys a product, calls the help desk, or opens a chat box to the billing department, that interaction should be logged into the system. You want to know who contacted you, why they contacted you, and how you handled their problem, request, or complaint.

#### Reporting

Whether the member management system is a full-featured CRM or a simple spreadsheet, it should be capable of reporting to management on issues or areas of concern and importance. Such reports should include new member counts, lost member counts (along with a cross tabulation of the reasons for member departure), classes attended, classes offered but not attended, MLS rules violations (cause and count), and other operational details that can be tabulated. It is critical to use the customer service software system in combination with the MLS system to increase communications with agents.

#### Marquee Scrolling Emergency Messages

These are messages that continuously scroll on the MLS screen until the user acknowledges them by clicking the mouse, which indicates that the message is received. All users can see this information when they log in or during their session if they are already online. For example, a typical marquee message might be used to communicate hold times to agents who are thinking of calling the help desk.

#### Customer Emailing

With the click of a checkbox, you can designate that a specific service note should be emailed to a subset of customers. This can be used as a way to notify customers about some action they need to take (e.g, change their passwords or pay their monthly fees).

#### Broadcast Messages

This allows authorized individuals to post a message in the system that can be seen by all selected agents in specific service groups. Broadcast messages are presented to users when they log in. This is a convenient communications tool to keep subscribers informed of important information.

#### Chat

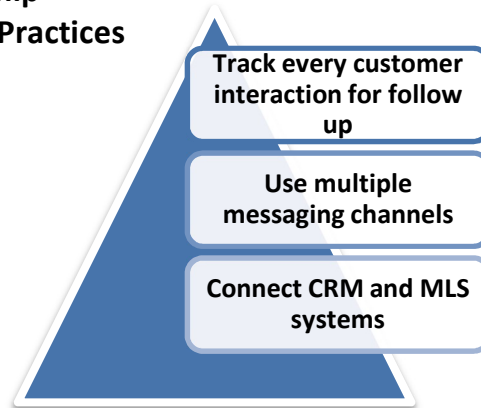
Customers have the ability from within the MLS system to open a chat session and screen share with a customer service representative.

The key to a good CRM system is flexibility. As MLS systems evolve and move toward a larger menu of services, the CRM system should keep up with your progress.

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<sup>6</sup> Zendesk, Inc. is a software development company based in San Francisco, California. It is listed on the New York Stock Exchange.

## Customer Relationship Management (CRM) Best Practices



### METRICS

It is essential to create service standards, and measure performance to those standards.

The concept of improvement has, at its heart, the act of measurement. That which is not measured cannot be managed. Choosing the right Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) is reliant upon having a good understanding of what is important to the organization. What is most important often depends on the department measuring the performance. For example, KPIs that are useful to finance will be quite different from KPIs that are assigned to sales.

In order to achieve excellence in customer service, one must first define what excellence is when compared to mediocrity or inferiority. Service standards serve two purposes. First, they are a powerful force for shaping the image that your customers have of you, particularly if you publish the standards to which you hold yourself and the MLS. They become your promise to your subscribers. Secondly, standards are a tool for measuring how well each employee in your organization achieves those levels of service. Such measures are essential for your business's success.

KPIs are your best measure of the effectiveness of your help desk and customer service efforts. Most phone systems will measure quantity-related metrics and allow you to set parameters to report the percentage of time or calls that meet the performance requirements.

### Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Percentage of incoming calls an agent answers in an established amount of time (e.g. ,90% of incoming calls answered within 45 seconds or less)

Average speed of answering (ASA) an incoming call

Call abandonment rate - number of calls abandoned by the caller before being answered

Average handle time (AHT) - average handle time to service calls or total time CSR handled the entire call

Answer rate – number of calls answered in comparison to the total call volume arriving

The amount of time an agent passes actively versus idly waiting for a call. Too high a number may indicate you are overstaffed

Documentation - number of incoming calls an agent took and compares the number of cases created

First contact resolution rate - properly diagnosing the subscriber's issue on the initial point of contact

A more detailed sample of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) can be found in Appendix A: Sample Key Performance Indicators Detail.

### **Real-Time Customer Service Reports, Dashboards, Metrics, and Analytics**

If you operate your own help desk or call center and have followed the advice to install a capable, appropriately sized CRM system, be sure it can report the current status of your calls in real-time. How many callers are on hold? What is their average wait time right now? What has been the pattern for the past few hours and does that deviate from the normal daily ebb and flow of calls? Do irregularities point to some system issue that should be investigated? The answers to all of these questions should be displayed on the dashboard monitor screen at all times.

In each of those measures, there is a danger of obsessing on the numbers at the expense of actually delivering good customer service. For example, systems that stress low call time over first call resolution may score well and handle a high volume of calls, but may do poorly in actually answering the callers' questions. When subsequent calls are required, the system is not working. Be sure to allow your CSRs sufficient time to treat the customer well while also handling the issue with reasonable dispatch.

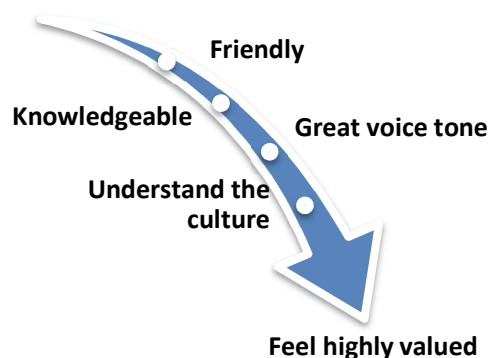
Service standards should be measurable in some way, because without some metric of change you cannot manage and train for improvement. Some would argue that it is difficult to measure service qualities for excellence. For example, how do you measure "friendly?" It may be a non-measurable feeling, but the elements that make up "friendly" can be measured. You can measure smiles (in person and on the phone – the smile comes through the wires). You can measure customer greetings such as "good morning" or "good afternoon;" the personal introduction, "this is Mary, how can I help you?;" and the sign off sending customers on their way, "thanks for calling and have a great day."

You can measure the number of times that employees use a customer's name. For example, it's recommended that employees use a customer's name at least twice during a conversation. (Balance is important. Excessive use of customer's name can come across as condescending, so judicious limitation is highly recommended.) By taking time to observe these measurable items, you can essentially measure "friendly."

In "Customer Service for Dummies<sup>7</sup>," there are seven criteria for developing standards, according to Leland & Bailey. According to these non-dummies, standards should be specific, concise, measurable, based on customer requirements, written into job descriptions and performance reviews, jointly created with employees, and fairly enforced throughout the organization.

CSRs can also be compensated or rewarded (via bonus) based on meeting or exceeding standard service levels as well as levels of customer satisfaction. Many systems will automatically send an email to the caller (at the email address on file in the CRM system) after each call asking "How did we do?" The email should document the date and time of the call, as well as identify the CSR who handled the event. When employees are compensated based on how satisfied the customer feels at the end of the call, not only will productivity increase, but the regard with which your customer base holds your entire staff will also increase.

### **Great Customer Service Representative (CSR) Traits**



<sup>7</sup> Leland, Karen and Keith Bailey, 1995. *Customer Service for Dummies*, IDG Books Worldwide, Inc., Foster City, CA.

## **Follow-Up Surveys**

Your CRM system should be able to automatically generate a follow-up survey to every caller (or selected subset of callers chosen at random). Believe it or not, customers who are asked, “How well was your inquiry handled?” are more likely to be happier with the service than those who are not asked, but were treated exactly the same. Because agents feel more valued when you ask them their opinion on how your service can be improved, a continuous improvement philosophy in the customer satisfaction survey process will drive customer satisfaction and loyalty to even higher levels.

Computer-generated calls (with a human recording, not a computer-synthesized voice, delivering the message) are okay, but if staff levels or slack times in call volume permit, a personal friendly voice on the telephone is an excellent tool for maintaining good public relations with your customers. Follow-up telephone calls (or even better, personal visits from your account management team members) can also be a source of information and feedback about how the business is perceived. Follow up is one of the most effective ways for developing customer loyalty. The feedback from loyal customers can help guide the decision makers in deciding where to invest time and other resources in the important things that matter. It can steer you away from the less important activities. This directional assistance is the biggest payoff from a customer-centered strategy.

The survey does not have to be long (in fact the shorter the better). Agents are busy and will seldom answer more than two or three questions. At minimum you want to ask:

1. How satisfied were they with the interaction today?
2. How likely are they to call back again when they have problems?
3. What is the likelihood that they will give a positive response if asked by a peer about this experience?

The last question is essential. It is a variation on the marketing question: “How likely are you to recommend our company or service to a friend?” If you like something well enough to rave about it, it not only spreads the brand and good will about the brand, but it also makes the recommender feel better about the decision they made. The agent feels they did the right thing by calling the MLS help desk. The agent is happy and willing to share the good experience. If the customer has a high “feel good factor” as a result of exceptional service from the MLS staff, their perception and appreciation of the entire organization is raised.



## **HELP DESK PROCESSES AND PROCEDURES**

No MLS system is self-explanatory. Today’s sophisticated systems are intricate enough that even the power user sometimes has a need for guidance and assistance. Depending on the size of your MLS and staff, you may wish to

contract out your support services to your MLS vendor or a third-party company. Caution is advised when considering contracted services, since most real estate agents view their local market and their local MLS system as highly specialized for their individual needs. Unless the contracted service provider can talk to your members as if they have at some time “walked a mile in their shoes,” you are advised to consider local support.

Your MLS vendor can approximate this local level of service since they are most intimately acquainted with the operation of the system. They know the reasons behind some of the customized functions or fields in the MLS database. Outside services, particularly those offshore that may employ help desk representatives who are not familiar with the MLS concept of cooperation (as is the case in most countries outside the U.S.), may not grasp the urgency of a caller who starts the conversation with, “I have a buyer in my car and I can’t pull my tour list.”

### **In-House Versus Outsourced Staff**

Most MLS vendors offer an option for technical support for the MLS core system. Depending on the size of the MLS user base, this option may be more economical than hiring staff to handle this function. Plus, in using the vendor’s own staff for support, the MLS may find the level of understanding is far more developed due to their experience and singular focus on that system alone. Many vendors also support clients in all time zones, so you may find the service day offered by the vendor could be 12-14 hours, as opposed to the 8-10 hours that an MLS might offer. Given that most productive agents work nights and weekends, these extended-support windows can be extremely beneficial to subscribers as well as to the reputation of the MLS for supporting them.

### **Levels of Support**

If you choose to handle at least some of the support calls yourself, you must also determine what level of support you can and will offer. Don’t bite off more than you can chew. Poor technical support carries a worse stigma than not having a local help desk at all.

There are traditionally three levels of technical support; an MLS can offer one, two, or all three levels depending on staff and technical proficiency.

**Level I Support:** The first point of contact. This is the basic level of support where calls are logged into the CRM and triaged. Basic troubleshooting and elementary problems are resolved. Examples of this include basic how-to questions, software diagnostic, password resets, account creation, etc.

**Level II Support:** This level of support is where cases from the Level I support queue are escalated if the Level I rep is unable to resolve the issue. Cases should only be escalated to the Level II queue if a suitable and appropriate outcome cannot be achieved by a Level I representative.

**Level III Support** - If the issues require advanced-level technical assistance or technical assistance from one of your vendors, the case is directed to a Level III queue for research, troubleshooting, and resolution. Level III support is typically handled only by the system vendor, since such high degree of difficulty problems are usually well beyond the capabilities of MLS staff.

### **Traditional Levels of Support**



Always triage inbound calls quickly and connect the caller to someone who can help solve their particular problem. Call escalation is an important process to define clearly and follow diligently. Nothing will frustrate a caller faster than a CSR

who is in over their head on a problem, but is slow to ask for help from the next support level. By the time the call is transferred up the chain, the caller is frustrated or mad, and the second rep who receives the call is in for an earful of grief before the problem can even be described.

The handoff from Level II to Level III is sometimes tricky, particularly if Level III support is handled by the MLS vendor or outside service supplier. If possible, have your phone system configured so the transfer can be made by the local staff person on behalf of the caller (like switching the call to another extension). One of the most cited frustrations by help desk callers is explaining the situation to one person only to be told, "We can't help you here, please call this number." The handoff to the next level of support should appear to the caller as if it is just an internal call transfer.

Other channels of support besides telephone should also be considered and implemented whenever possible. Such alternate channels that should be considered include online chat box; social media; wiki-style user content contributed by subscribers (and searchable through a natural language query interface); and text-based message systems, particularly those that notify agents if there is a system irregularity or outage.

Consider the use of a ticketing system to keep track of all the information. This will help track and manage escalated tickets. Ticketing systems allow all stakeholders to view status of the issue and to notify customers once the issue is resolved.

### **Support Staff and Resources**

If you decide that local support staff is the best solution, you must provide your CSRs with a quiet environment in which to work and equip them with the necessary tools to accomplish their tasks. A wide open bullpen of reps cradling phone receivers between chin and shoulder while trying to switch computer screens between the troubleshooting script and the screen-share view of the customer's monitor will not be an atmosphere conducive to the best support service.

Semi-open cubicles with head-high (while seated) noise reduction partitions is the best solution for support centers of four or more CSRs. Such low-wall separations enable the rep to stand and signal another rep or supervisor when assistance is needed.

It isn't just important to plan how your support operation is physically configured, but also where it is located in proximity to other departments. Customer support operations are inherently noisy. Reps are on the phone continuously and during busy call times. The din from multiple voices helping many customers at once can be disturbing to other departments that need quieter surroundings. Don't locate the call center next to the finance department or in-house programming staff (if you have them). Support staff should be near other "chatty" departments, such as marketing or compliance, where their sound levels will blend in better.

One last caveat: don't locate the support reps next to the lobby or reception area. When CSRs are handling a particularly difficult caller, it is unprofessional to have the conversations overheard by visitors waiting for service.

The phone system is also critical. Headsets are an absolute must as they reduce background noise for the caller and amplify the rep's voice so that CSRs don't have to shout over each other to be heard. Wireless headsets are a viable option that offer the CSR an opportunity to stand and stretch without losing connection to a caller. However, whether the phone extension is wired or wireless, the base station must have the ability for a manager or supervisor to "jack in" to the call by plugging in a headset at the CSRs desk to monitor or participate in the call if asked. Such a physical connection can eliminate the need to transfer the caller or create a three-way connection when a question is asked that is beyond the scope of the CSR to handle. Plus, having the supervisor join the call provides an on-the-spot training opportunity for the CSR to learn an answer to a question they may receive in the future.



## **Training and Education**

One of the best ways to cut down on the influx of support calls is to have an active and rigorous training and education curriculum. If budget permits, having one professionally trained educator on staff full time is the equivalent of adding two or three help desk reps. A trainer who delivers four 1-hour classes each day, three days each week, to 30 agents in each class, will potentially reach 18,000 people in one year, and hopefully intercept many times that number of support calls through prior guidance.

Classes don't need to be delivered live or in person. With the explosion of internet-based applications that permit livestreaming of classroom presentations, agents can be reached in the comfort of their own homes or offices. The sessions can be recorded and posted for replay and review by other agents on demand.

Online instruction should be available as a full-length lecture video as well as broken down into smaller sections. Each module addresses one detailed aspect of the MLS system operation. Such vignettes can be cross referenced and indexed to the search function in your online website dedicated to training and support. An agent could search "How do I..." and be directed immediately to a short video that answers the question.

Adults learn in many different ways, and much differently than children. Different age groups within the adult demography learn differently. Some hear, others see. Some grasp the instruction through demonstration, others through hands-on trial and error. It is important that the MLS provide a variety of teaching styles that cater to the different learning methods and generations.

## **Call Tracking, Monitoring, and Recording**

Many telephone systems offer an option to record calls placed or received by designated CSR extensions (those used for customer support or help desk operations). If you choose to use such a system, it is imperative that you alert callers that the call may be monitored or recorded for training or verification purposes. Some states do not require this notice, but this will avoid any misunderstandings about your intent; good practice dictates that notice is given, even if not required.

Some systems will record snapshots of the CSR's and/or customer's computer screen in sync with the audio recording, so a monitor can both see and hear the call's progress. Such call recordings are a good way to review with help desk personnel their techniques in handling calls. They can also be used to verify or discount anecdotal reports from members about mishandled or problematic calls.

Call monitoring does not need to be a full-time enterprise. Independent monitoring firms such as whoscalling.com can be contracted for spot checks or annual reviews at a reasonable cost<sup>8</sup>. There are also freeware solutions available, such as Audacity®, which is an open-source, cross-platform software for recording and editing sounds. This freeware allows you to record calls via a manual process and save the recordings as .WAV files for later review. Go to <http://audacity.sourceforge.net/> to learn more.

The objective of a call monitoring program is to focus on quality improvement by reviewing scored forms, analyzing trends, identifying customer experience opportunities, and making recommendations for quality improvements based on these findings.

The quality assurance program should be designed with the customer in mind. Customer interactions are typically scored based on the CSR's ability to provide top notch service, including exceptional soft skills, solid product, and

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<sup>8</sup> For more information on such services, see *This Call May Be Monitored* - <http://www.inc.com/magazine/20050601/customer-service.html>.

process knowledge, as well as the willingness to go the extra mile for the customer by offering additional resources that he/she may not have known were available to them prior to contacting our support team.

You can also consider offering CSRs incentives for high-quality performance and coaching them throughout the month on any opportunities for development.

If you record calls for training purposes, be sure to use what you collect. Have regularly scheduled review sessions with each CSR, perhaps once per week with new employees scaling back to one per month for veteran reps. Review sessions should be short, no more than half an hour, and limited to three calls. The calls should be preselected to include one great, one average, and one where improvement can be counseled. In all cases, be sure not to structure the reviews as “gotcha” sessions. Reviewing recordings with staff can be very productive if handled in a proactive, constructive manner. This is a teaching/learning experience, not a disciplinary review.

Create an effective "soft skills" training plan for your staff. Too often, CSRs know all about the technical and product/service feature issues but have not received thorough and ongoing training for people skills and effective customer engagement. Make sure they get that training! It is often less important what you say than how you say it.



## **SYSTEMS AND PROCESSES**

### **New Member Process or Onboarding**

There is an old adage in the computer programming world, “Good software won’t fix a bad process.” It will just make the bad process get worse faster. With that in mind, it’s important to have a good process in place for onboarding new members before trying to computerize the process. An important part of your MLS handbook for office operations should be a step-by-step check list of the details of handling the new subscriber enrollment process, from first contact to full completion of the process, including tracking any requirements placed on the member (such as mandatory classes). At each stage of the process you should include who on your staff is responsible for completing or verifying each step.

### **Billing Supervision and Support**

The one time each year when the MLS is guaranteed to be overrun with phone calls is during the dues billing cycle. Many MLSs have converted to quarterly or monthly billing managed by an automated billing and receivables system that allows agents to pay fees online or automatically through bank account or credit card debits.

Regardless of the frequency or method of billing, handling billing questions and calls is always challenging. Any time employees are handling money there is an opportunity for problems. The CMLS Best Practices Guide to Finance contains details about the financial oversight necessary to ensure that MLS assets are protected and that processes are in place to prevent misappropriation of funds. Those guidelines and protections should extend throughout the organization, and not be limited to just the finance and general administrative areas. Nor should such guidelines be emphasized only during billing cycles.

Depending on the integration of the customer service system to the general office network, and particularly to the billing functions of the finance department, customer service personnel may be allowed access to financial information

about customers on a need-to-know basis. It is important that CSRs be trained in what is appropriate for them to access and act upon.

For example, if your CSR team can take orders for training session tickets, and if those orders involve a cost that a subscriber wishes to charge to a credit card, customer reps must understand that retaining credit card information in any form outside of the secured computer system is not to be tolerated. Even the simple act of writing down the card number and then tossing it in the trash exposes the MLS to potential liability should that slip of paper be used later in a credit card fraud incident, even if the fraud is perpetrated by a non-employee.

Separate customer service functions from financial functions. Whenever possible, such an opportunity should be avoided by not allowing financial functions to be handled by non-financial personnel. Automate ordering and billing for functions and services through your company intranet website. Do not take credit cards over the phone for any reason in the customer service department. If a phone order must be taken, policy should dictate that the call is transferred to the financial manager or staff for processing.

### **Technical Support Versus Product Support**

Providing support for the services and products offered by the MLS is as important, perhaps more so than the services themselves. It is not effective for an MLS to offer a library of options to its subscribers if the services are not used by the members because they don't understand how to use them. Technical support differs from product support. The former focuses on how to get things done within a program (usually the MLS system itself), while the latter may extend beyond simple usage instruction to include product comparisons and selection criteria to assist subscribers in picking which services best suit their business needs.

### **Walk-In Technical Support**

Some MLSs have experimented with walk-in or carry-in technical support for not only the MLS system and licensed products, but also for agents' equipment. Users are encouraged to stop by the MLS office, even without an appointment, and bring along their broken PCs or Macs.

Ohio State legend Woody Hayes<sup>9</sup> is famous for justifying his reliance on a running game by saying, "Three things can happen when you pass the football. Two of them are bad." Likewise, three things can happen when MLS staff starts working on a customer's computer – all of them bad:

1. The problem isn't solved; in fact things go from bad to worse.
2. The customer has subsequent problems of a like or unlike nature (doesn't matter) and blames MLS staff – "You must have done something to this machine because now it doesn't work."
3. If you fix the problem, you still have a friend for life, someone who will keep coming back and back and back with every little thing that could go wrong with that computer, most of which is pilot error.

Leave the hardware to the experts and have a list of local shops to which you can refer customers. Stay with what you know – software and MLS systems.

### **After-Hours Support**

After-hours support can be made available through a published online knowledge base, a wiki-style website with contributions from all (staff and users). Articles and answers should be edited by a central control point to keep knowledge on point with policy. Such a database of knowledge will not only contain answers to often asked questions and technical guidance (troubleshooting procedures), but also tips and tricks that make using the system easier.

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<sup>9</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Woody\\_Hayes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Woody_Hayes).

An effective knowledge base<sup>10</sup> software system should help a company do one or more of the following:

- Foster innovation by encouraging the free flow of ideas
- Improve customer service by streamlining response time
- Enhance employee retention rates by recognizing the value of employees' knowledge and rewarding them for it (you might also run contests among users for the best contributions)
- Streamline operations and reduce costs by eliminating redundant or unnecessary processes
- Increase customer satisfaction since a knowledge base portal is available 24 hours a day

### **Mobile MLS Support**

The proliferation of mobile devices has opened many opportunities for self help, both after hours and even when the help desk is open and operational. Most MLS vendors have developed a mobile app or mobile version of the MLS system that subscribers can use from anywhere they have a cell or Wi-Fi signal. Your help desk should be equally accessible and easy to use whether a phone call is involved or not. As you develop the knowledge base, make sure it can be searched and read from mobile devices.



### **DEALING WITH DIFFICULT SITUATIONS**

#### **Calls from the Public**

Not all calls an MLS help desk receives are from subscribers or participants. With the proliferation of public listing display sites, it is more and more common for the MLS help desk to receive calls directly from the public. Often, these calls will be from a homeowner who has a concern about how their listing is being displayed on xyz.com. They may insist that the MLS change or remove the listing from certain websites.

Such cases cannot and should not be handled by the MLS unless the nature of the call is about a data inaccuracy on the website (data being displayed is different than that showing in the MLS database). In this case, intervention by the MLS with the website is warranted, and should be undertaken immediately.

Otherwise, the MLS is obligated to refer the call to the agent or brokerage manager with whom the homeowner has contracted for the sale of the house. If, for example, the homeowner wants one particular picture removed from the photo album, the MLS should either connect the caller to the listing agent or let the caller know you will notify the agent/broker and ask them to coordinate the change with the seller. The MLS should never get between the seller and the broker. To do so invites trouble from both sides of the contract.

#### **Handling Conflict**

It's essential to deal immediately and effectively with difficult customers.

One veteran MLS CEO was known to direct his staff to transfer any call from one particularly troublesome broker directly to his private line whenever the help desk received such a call. He explained that he considered the difficult customer a positive resource; that an unfiltered tirade from such "tells it like it is." Information is likely to explode in the heat of the

<sup>10</sup> Source: CIO Magazine. *The ABCs of Knowledge Management*, Megan Santosus & John Sermacz.

moment that might otherwise be kept private or expressed in more politically correct terms that don't adequately convey the anxiety felt by the caller.

We all know that the MLS is an easy target that agents use to vent their frustration, even when the MLS is not the source of the problem. All employees should be trained and experienced in handling difficult customers. Consider bringing in an outside trainer at least once each year for instruction and guidance in handling the difficult customer. If such in-person training is not within the reach of your budget, there are excellent online and subscription services available, such as "The Telephone Doctor" videos from Nancy Friedman.<sup>11</sup>

Take a positive approach to complaints. Empathy works. Employees who embrace the concerns raised by a caller and deal with those concerns calmly, with empathy, and with honesty can often turn a difficult customer into an advocate for the company.

## **INTEGRATING THE CUSTOMER-FOCUSED CULTURE**

Customer service best practices starts with the customer service philosophy, culture, mission, and objectives, as described in the beginning of this document. Employee satisfaction is critical to customer satisfaction. The "smile in the mirror" is a well-established technique taught to CSRs early in their tenure. Your voice sounds much more pleasant, and helpful, if you smile while you talk. Happy, smiling employees do more than just sound good on the phone.

The 10 Steps to Customer Focus:

1. Understand your customer segments
2. Understand your customer's needs
3. Listen to internal and external customers
4. Anticipate and analyze the impact of change to customers
5. Prioritize according to customer need and impact
6. Set expectations for timing of issue resolution
7. Provide quick, transparent responses to customer issues
8. Keep customers apprised of issues resolution progress
9. Measure how you performed on delivery of the change or issue resolution
10. Recognize and celebrate putting customers at the center of your business decisions

Maintain happy employees. Happy employees lead to happy customers. In many businesses, especially service-oriented companies, the employees' attitudes track directly with the quality of customer service.

Again, Herb Kelleher argues, "Put employees first and customers second." At first this may seem at odds with a customer-focused philosophy. If, by extension, a happy employee makes for a happy customer, then this is logical. Southwest Airlines has instilled a spirit of entrepreneurship and a level of lightheartedness in its employees. (Search YouTube for "Southwest flight attendants" and be prepared for the frivolity.) Their philosophy is that Southwest Airlines is in the people business and it just happens to run an airline.

Best-selling author Tom Peters<sup>12</sup> evangelizes making work fun. In a company that makes work fun, employees look forward to their jobs and feel valued and appreciated. If happy employees are treated as happy customers, the employee wins, the customer wins, and the business wins.

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<sup>11</sup> [www.telephonedoctor.com](http://www.telephonedoctor.com). St. Louis, MO. Phone 800.882.9911. email: [info@telephonedoctor.com](mailto:info@telephonedoctor.com).

<sup>12</sup> Tom Peters and Robert Waterman, 1982, *In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's Best-Run Companies*, Harper Collins Publishers, New York City \*High-tech, High-touch Customer Service, Michah Solomon.

A reputation for exemplary customer service is not earned overnight. Nor is a responsive and caring customer relations team built in a week. Both take time. If you set the course properly, trim the sails according to the prevailing conditions, and captain the ship with purpose, integrity, authority, and empathy, you can build a world-class customer-oriented organization that will be the envy of your peers and the pride of your subscriber base.



## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Sample Key Performance Indicators Detail

<b>Cost</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Cost/contact</li><li>•Cost/minute of handle time</li></ul>	<b>Quality</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Call quality</li><li>•Customer satisfaction</li><li>•Percent of calls requiring rework</li></ul>	<b>Productivity</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Contacts/agent-month</li><li>•Agent utilization</li></ul>
<b>Agent</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Agent occupancy</li><li>•Agent turnover</li><li>•Absenteeism</li><li>•Training hours</li><li>•Agents as percent of total FTEs</li><li>•Schedule adherence</li><li>•Agent tenure</li><li>•Agent satisfaction</li></ul>	<b>Service Level</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Average speed of answer</li><li>•Call abandonment rate</li><li>•Percent answered within 30 seconds</li><li>•Average queue time</li><li>•Average hold time</li></ul>	<b>Call Handling</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Call handle time</li><li>•Talk time</li><li>•After call work time</li><li>•First contact resolution rate</li><li>•Percent of calls transferred</li></ul>

## **Appendix B: Suggested Reading**

There are thousands of books written on various philosophies of customer service. Some cited in this guide and recommended for your research include:

Peters, Tom and Waterman, Robert, 1982, "In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's Best-Run Companies," Harper Collins Publishers, New York City

Freiberg, Kevin and Jackie Freiberg, 1996. "Nuts! Southwest Airlines' Crazy Recipe for Business and Personal Success," Bard Press, Inc., Austin, TX

Collins, James, 2001, "Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap...and Others Don't," HarperCollins Publishers, New York City

Spector, Robert and Patrick D. McCarthy, 1995. "The Nordstrom Way, The Inside Story of America's #1 Customer Service Company," John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Canada

Whiteley Richard, C., 1991. "The Customer-Driven Company, Moving From Talk to Action," Addison-Wesley, Reading, MA

Leland, Karen and Keith Bailey, 1995. "Customer Service for Dummies," IDG Books Worldwide, Inc., Foster City, CA

Blanchard, Ken and Bowles, Sheldon, 1993, "Raving Fans: A Revolutionary Approach to Customer Service," Random House Publisher, New York City

For more information and guidance on how to create a world-class customer service organization, we recommend the following resource:

Dr. Bruce Isaacson, 2012. "Using Customer Journey Maps to Improve Your Customer Experience," MMR Strategy Group

**The Customer Care Institute (CCI)** is an international resource organization that assists professionals with improving the delivery of customer care.

The institute's resources include:

- Customer care certification courses
- Front-line skills and management training
- Customer satisfaction measurement programs
- Customer care assessments
- Other programs designed to improve customer loyalty

Website: <http://www.customercare.com/>

## **Appendix C: Top 10 Most Recommended Customer Relationship Management Systems**

Source: <http://www.softwareadvice.com/crm/> (Note: Software names are hyperlinks)

**Salesforce.com** Salesforce.com is the market leader among cloud-based CRM providers. It serves a wide range of industries and business sizes. Because the system is web-based, users can access this powerful solution anywhere with Internet access.

**InfusionSoft** Built for small- and medium-sized sales and marketing teams, InfusionSoft offers tools for managing customer relationships from contact to conversion. It serves users in a variety of industries from health care to hospitality.

**NetSuite CRM+** NetSuite CRM+ provides a breadth of features for increasing sales, marketing and support efficiency. Managers can closely monitor performance and forecast future sales, while fine-tuning processes for maximum efficiency.

**Hatchback** Hatchback is an all-in-one sales and marketing software for small- to mid-size companies; it combines email marketing, CRM and marketing automation. Sales and marketing teams can effortlessly manage contacts and email campaigns.

**TrackerRMS CRM** TrackerRMS CRM has an emphasis on lead, opportunity, and sales management. This robust system features advanced search options, making it easy to organize sales and ultimately boost the bottom line.

**Salesforce.com Service Cloud** Built on the powerful Salesforce1 Platform, Service Cloud is a robust and user-friendly customer service solution that allows companies to engage customers and deliver exemplary customer service from anywhere.

**Mothernode CRM** For any SMB looking to organize and streamline its sales process or for those facing enterprise sales management challenges, Mothernode CRM offers a cost-effective, powerful SaaS CRM and SFA solution.

**Zendesk** Used by over 20,000 global companies, Zendesk has made a name for itself as a sophisticated, yet simple web-based help desk solution.

**SalesOutlook CRM** SalesOutlook CRM was designed to build upon the practicality and familiarity of the Microsoft Outlook platform. The system integrates easily with Constant Contact, providing an efficient way to create an ideal email campaign.

**Freshdesk** Freshdesk simplifies customer support by centralizing all customer interactions into a single, affordable, web-based solution. Phone calls, emails, web chats and even social media outreach is fully supported in this solution.

**Appendix D: Sample Best Practices Checklist for Customer Service and Support**

<b>CUSTOMER SERVICE AND SUPPORT</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>COMMENTS</b>
<b>Customer Service Philosophy</b>			
Is customer service philosophy applicable in broad range of situations?			
Does philosophy address every possible customer interaction?			
Are employees empowered to use good judgment in all situations?			
Are policies reviewed annually?			
Are outdated or unnecessary policies discarded?			
Does management actively participate in practicing the philosophy?			
Are employees treated the way customers should be treated?			
Do employees and customers collaborate on problems/solutions?			
Is there an environment of continuous improvement?			
Is the customer the focus of all your business decisions?			
Do you reward employees based on customer satisfaction?			
<b>Culture</b>			
Are your employees happy?			
Do your CSRs have a mirror to smile into while on a call?			
Do you follow Tom Peters' advice and make work fun?			
<b>Objectives</b>			
Do you have a strategic plan with specific goals?			
Do you have written objectives for each goal?			
Were your objectives developed with employee input?			
Were your objectives developed with customer input?			
Do you address problems proactively and honestly with customers?			
Is staff trained to ask open-ended questions of customers?			
Do you use focus groups to collect customer input?			
Do you survey customers to collect input and feedback?			
Do you poll customers on satisfaction after they call the help desk?			
Do you use secret shopper techniques to gauge help desk technique?			
Do you publish polling data and feedback within the company?			
Do you have a system for tracking feedback and input (CRM or other)?			
Does your CRM system integrate with your MLS system?			

<b>COMMUNICATION</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>COMMENTS</b>
Can your CRM communicate with your customers			
– Using system marquee scrolling			
– Using email			
– Using popups at login			
– Live chat with help desk			
<b>Metrics</b>			
Do you measure performance against service standards?			
Do you use KPIs (Key Performance Indicators)?			
Does your help desk system report real-time metrics?			
Do you compensate CSRs based on performance to standards?			
Do you compensate CSRs based on customer satisfaction ratings?			
Do you survey callers following help desk interaction?			
Is your support service sized properly for your MLS?			
Are calls to your help desk triaged and addressed quickly?			
Do you use alternate channels for help desk (e.g., social media, chat, etc.)?			
Is help available online during nights and weekends?			
<b>Resources and environment</b>			
Do CSRs have a quiet, yet collaborative environment to work in?			
Are all CSRs equipped with headsets?			
Can supervisor connect to CSR phones to monitor or assist on calls?			
Is there a trainer on your support team?			
Do you train CSRs on soft skills (people skills)?			
Do you record calls for training and monitoring purposes?			
Do you review calls with your CSRs to improve performance?			
<b>Billing Supervision and Support</b>			
Do you separate service functions from financial functions in your CRM?			
Do you specifically not do tech support on customers' hardware?			
Do you offer after-hours help through an online self-help portal?			
Can your users add tips and tricks to the online knowledge base?			
Can subscribers use MLS and get help through mobile website or apps?			
Do you refer non-subscribers (homeowners) directly to agent/broker?			
Do you address difficult callers immediately and directly?			
Is the CSR team taught to be empathetic to callers?			

## Appendix E: Reference List and Contributing Organizations

### Reference List

Amazon.com

Audacity.sourceforge.net

*Built to Last*, James Collins and Jerry Porras

*The ABCs of Knowledge Management*, Megan Santosus & John Sermacz

*Customer Service for Dummies*, Karen Leland and Keith Bailey

*Electronic Commerce: A Managerial Perspective*, Efraim Turban

Herb Kelleher

*High-tech, High-touch Customer Service*, Michah Solomon

*In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's Best-Run Companies*, Tom Peters and Robert Waterman

*Nuts! Southwest Airlines' Crazy Recipe for Business and Personal Success*, Kevin Freiberg and Jackie Freiberg

Salesforce.com Inc.

Telephonedoctor.com

*The Customer-Driven Company, Moving From Talk to Action*, Richard Whiteley

*The Nordstrom Way, The Inside Story of America's #1 Customer Service Company*, Robert and Patrick D. McCarthy

Whoscalling.com

Wikipedia.com

Zendesk, Inc.

### Contributing Organizations

Metropolitan Regional Information Systems, Inc. (MRIS)

MOVE, Inc.

REALTOR.com® call center