

Want happy customers? Then respond to them

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Customer expectations are shifting and how quickly an adjuster or other insurance representative responds has a direct impact on customer satisfaction. (Photo: iStock)

One of the main drivers of [customer satisfaction](#) in any industry is responsiveness, and insurance is no exception. In today's 24/7, constantly connected world, [expectations](#) are rapidly shifting.

Customer service through internet-based businesses like [AirBnB and Uber](#) is setting a higher bar of customer expectations; and insurers may feel they are coming up short. Instant, real-time access to data and services, multiple omni-channel messaging options and 24-hour customer support lines are not unusual.

If customers can't get what they want, when they want it, then they'll go to a competitor. Conversely, great responsiveness leads to satisfaction, loyalty and will even convert some customers into evangelists for your brand.

Losing out on leads

Leads are squandered when insurers fail to respond in a timely manner. Online insurance buyers wait an average of 2.3 days to get a call after submitting an online quote form and a shocking 39 percent of potential customers do not receive a call back, according to Velocify's [Insurance Industry Online Buyer Experiences](#) study.

The research also found that the average wait-time for an email response was 22 hours, even though responding within 20 minutes can increase conversion rates by 49 percent. Given the fact that email automation is so easy nowadays, this is unforgivable – especially to millennials.

According to an [Accenture Global study](#), two-thirds of consumers prefer to use digital channels to check on claims status, while 53 percent will not recommend a carrier to friends and family if it lacks the option to use digital channels. Mobile access and self-service portals where policyholders can go to create their own [household contents inventories](#), are becoming more popular.



(Photo: iStock)

Building a solid online portal

Existing customers expect swift responses to queries, transparency and speed in claims processing, and flexible self-service options that meet their needs. Luckily, there are new technologies out there to meet these requests and to help insurers plug the gaps in their online customer experience.

There are also benefits to self-service systems that allow customers to log on and fine-tune their policies at times that suit them, without the need for an insurance agent to take a call and walk them through it. Instead of trying to call during office hours, they can log in at any time to update inventories, review or

add coverage, and pay premiums. This can simultaneously reduce the burden on carriers and boost customer retention.

Policyholders should be able to select the options they want, especially for items like settlement payments, with options like preloaded debit cards, ACH transfers, or direct payments to third parties according to their preferences and needs. Some [platforms](#) offer indemnification beyond the standard issue of paper checks. Not only does this boost customer satisfaction, but processing funds electronically reduces substantial settlement costs.

Personalization is another important piece of the puzzle. Show insight into common customer problems and empower them to configure the precise coverage they need. A one-size-fits-all policy approach simply won't cut it.



The longer the response time to an inquiry, the less satisfied the customer becomes. (Photo: iStock)

Reduce response times

Research shows a direct correlation between responsiveness and satisfaction. The [J.D. Power 2016 U.S. Property Claims Satisfaction Study](#) suggested that belt tightening in the industry led to a decline in customer responsiveness, triggering a subsequent decline in customer satisfaction.

Shifting traffic from call centers to web portals can lead to significant reductions in the time it takes for customers or leads to get what they need. The majority of customers try a company's website before calling. If they can get their question answered, their quote assessed, or their claim processed quickly through a web portal, then most policyholders will choose that option. This could significantly reduce call center time, and allow agents to handle urgent queries requiring their expertise.

Of course, pushing customers onto the web only works if your company's online customer experience is good and you have a flexible portal with the backend support required for smooth operation. Investing resources into the online customer experience is no longer an option. If you want to stay competitive, it's a necessity.

Whatever digital transformation you adopt, whatever technologies you employ, and whatever products you offer, the aim should always be to create a better customer experience and reducing response times is a big part of that.