

## Could It Be? Customer Service Is Supposedly Getting Better

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And yet it's more likely for customers to switch providers for Internet, pay TV, banking, and other services. Go figure.

It seems as if everyone has a tale about Customer Service Hell. According to a new survey from the data research firm Verint, less than half (49%) of consumers worldwide say that they are "net satisfied" with the businesses they regularly interact with, including retailers, utilities, financial services, and pay TV, phone, and broadband providers.

In another global study, from Accenture, researchers cite "broken promises" as a prime reason that customers switch providers, followed by what seem to have become everyday customer service frustrations, including "dealing with agents who are unfriendly or impolite, having to contact customer service multiple times for the same reason, dealing with customer service agents who can't answer their question, being on hold for a long time, and having to repeat the same information to multiple agents."

Unfortunately, these hassles probably sound familiar. Perhaps one or more of them even led to you jumping ship to switch a provider recently. Accenture's data indicates 1 in 5 consumers switched a provider in 2012, a 5% increase compared to 2011. Consumers were particularly likely to change phone providers (26%, vs. 21% a year ago) and Internet service (23% vs. 19%).

These numbers, as well as old-fashioned word of mouth, would seem to be an indication that customer service is getting worse. According to Accenture data, though, fewer customers are dropping providers due to poor customer service, and customer service in general appears to be improving:

In mature markets, switching due to poor service is also on the decline, dropping from 60 percent to 49 percent (the first time below 50 percent) during the same period. Furthermore, in conjunction with this global decline in switching due to poor service, consumers are generally somewhat more satisfied with many aspects of customer service this year, with three general service satisfaction characteristics measured increasing by at least 5 percentage points from last year.

If bad customer service is less of a problem, why are more people switching providers? Well, the absence of good customer service may have something to do with it. In the survey, 85% of consumers who had switched providers said that the company could have retained their business by doing something differently—resolving the problem during the first contact (rather than requiring multiple phone calls and follow-ups), for instance, or giving them some kind of reward or special treatment as thanks for being a loyal customer.

Consumers are likely to feel no loyalty whatsoever to their providers nowadays because, in a way, loyalty is punished. What with special introductory rates and promotions aimed at attracting new customers, the structure of many provider business models results in longstanding customers paying far more than the folks who just started doing business with the company. The reward for being a blindly loyal customer, then, is the insult of higher and higher monthly bills.

Is it any wonder more of us are switching providers lately?

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