Email Management – Opportunities and Challenges

Organizations are losing business because of poor email management and business practices. Email Management software provides the necessary tools to create a substantial differentiator between competitors and results in immediate ROI.

Recent studies indicate that when customers or potential customers contact an online organization, 80% prefer communicating by email over phone and over 50% will not do business with a company if they do not receive an adequate response to their email within 24 hours. The average response time to a customer email inquiry is 72 hours.

Most Online organizations communicate regularly with customers and clients by email, but few provide a level of email customer service that satisfies their clientele. While email service standards are low, the benefits of communicating via email are palpable:

· Cost - an email conversation generally costs 75% less than a phone conversation.

· Time - the time it takes to respond to an email is significantly less than a phone call. Email also allows both the customer and your company representative to multitask, responding to email messages while attending to other matters.

· History - email allows for the easy tracking and retrieval of email conversations, which ensures accountability and allows for organizational benefits derived from the sharing of customer history and knowledge.

Challenges

Effectively managing email is critical to an organization's ongoing ability to service customers. The customer of today is increasingly familiar with your competitors, and is no longer willing to wait for a business to get back to them. From the moment an email inquiry reaches a company, the clock is ticking. The company must have the capacity to:

· Answer customer inquiries quickly and efficiently, despite potentially high volumes of email
· Answer customer inquiries accurately, with information relevant to the customer's needs
· Build and sustain lasting relationships with your customers

As you research means of managing the opportunities and problems of email communications, you will also find that the successful formula differs considerably from a traditional call-center service. There are new concepts and models which, when used properly, can greatly enhance your online customer service capability.

The Problem with Client-based Email

Traditional email, though widespread in use, fails to provide a framework for efficient and successful customer interaction. In the traditional model, each company representative runs email client software on their workstation for the purpose of interacting directly with customers. In such an environment, email communications are dispersed and isolated, and opportunities to manage, facilitate, and standardize customer interactions are practically non-existent.

Drawbacks include:

· Very difficult to monitor employee productivity
· No ability to intelligently or efficiently distribute employee workload
· No centralized store of communications history with customers
· Limited system administration potential (backups, archiving, etc.)
· Limited ability to increase productivity and training potential via collaboration
· No ability to access email systems from remote locations via the web
· No centralized store of customer contacts
· No ability to report on mail loads in order to refine business processes & operations

Email Management Benefits

Email management software, especially web-based solutions that focus on human-to-human interaction as opposed to automated systems, can provide a litany of tools and features designed to allow managers to intelligently and proactively direct the flow of email through their organization.

Email Routing - Email management software can effectively route email correspondence sent to an organization into individual queues. This allows groups of individuals to process messages sent to sales@, info@, support@, and other generic email inboxes, or the results of web form submissions. Specialized routing rules can be applied to inbound email messages, allowing for intelligent direction and pre-processing of email.

Centralized Knowledge Base - Email management tools can be used to build up a centralized repository of effective answers to common email inquiries. These can then be re-used by employees, providing productivity gains and quality control, as well as facilitating training efforts.

Email Policy and Standards - Enforce your organization's business rules with email processing features that allow for the application of headers and footers to outbound emails. These can be used to add notices and disclaimers to emails, decreasing liability and increasing standards conformity.

Incident Tracking - All email messages (inbound and outbound) relating to a specific incident are tracked automatically and viewed as a single unit of correspondence. This greatly facilitates customer interaction and personalization potential. It also ensures that email messages are never lost, overlooked, or forgotten.

Reporting and Analysis - Email management reporting systems can provide important insights into an organization's communications trends and efficiency. Reports can be used to identify problems early on, before they affect customers.

Communications History - Employees working with email management software have the ability to view the entire history of communications with any customer. This ensures that conversations with customers are always "in context"; the customer won't need to start from scratch each time they contact your organization.

Web Access - Some email management solutions are accessed by nothing more than a standard web browser, allowing employees to provide superior email customer service from any location that has an Internet connection.

Email management systems can provide an open, shared, and collaborative environment that obviates the need for "big brother" style email monitoring solutions. By providing access to the communications history of employees (based upon security rights), these systems allow management to increase accountability and head off problems early.

Conclusions

· Most organizations are losing business because their email customer service does not meet their customers' standards.
· Isolated email clients, such as Outlook, do not provide the necessary functionality to disperse, manage and oversee organizational email.
· While customer email service expectations are low, there is a definite opportunity to exceed customers' expectations and create a significant differentiator between yourself and competitors.
· Akin to the progression from individual phone lines to a phone distribution tree, Email Management Software automatically routes email to appropriate groups and individuals and ensures quality, timely responses, resulting in vastly improved customer satisfaction and immediate, recognizable ROI.

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