

Web Feature

Ted Werth stays close to customers as PlumChoice grows

Monitor customer satisfaction to keep up with changing needs

By Brooke Bates

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Ted Werth got frustrated trying to solve his father's technology problems in Washington, D.C., over the phone from Boston. So he started PlumChoice Online PC Services Inc. in 2001 to provide 24-7 remote repair and support for digital devices.

Early on, Werth interacted with most of the customers. But as the company grew, his 650 employees began to handle most of the direct contact.



"One of the biggest issues with companies as they grow is that the people who are making decisions get further and further separated from the actual customer," says Werth, chairman and CEO. "Once you get removed from the customers ... it's become more of a theoretical process than a real process of how you work with customers."

To maintain that connection with customers, consistently expose yourself to them and their reactions to your service.

Werth does this by monitoring calls between employees and customers at least weekly — sometimes even participating.

Not only does that give you insight into customers' issues, but it also lets you monitor how employees are providing solutions.

"You're looking for patience, how they communicate, effectiveness of the service that's being delivered, ... time that it takes to solve problems," Werth says. "And then, of course, we look at the customer surveys: How satisfied is the customer with the result of the work that was done, and why?"

Those surveys go out to every customer after each service, usually as an online questionnaire that pops up after the tech terminates the remote connection. It asks how satisfied the customer is on a scale of positive to negative, how likely the customer is to recommend the service on a scale of 0 to 10, and other open-ended questions.



Those ratings come back to the respective technicians, so employees know how their customer satisfaction and net promoter grades compare to the standard.

"You not only assist people through training, but you can also monitor adherence through the tools," Werth says. "It could be as high-level as you [mandate] a certain customer sat as a business. It could be that we develop the training and processes so that people understand what it takes to provide excellent customer sat. And then we monitor 100 percent of what they do; we can use those to build add-on training."

But even employees who don't deal directly with customers should know the recipe for their satisfaction.

"It takes a fair amount of work to get someone to understand the customer as well as they need to do their job in a way that affects the customer in a positive way," Werth says. "If we don't take the time to have them use our service, listen to the service, talk to the end customer, they're really not clear on what they're [doing]."

"Get them a chance to sit down next to an agent who's providing service [and] listen in to the calls so they start to appreciate what customers want. It's really getting a chance to listen to the customers' reactions that gives the context for understanding why we're in business, what we're doing as a business."

By hearing how customers respond to the service they receive — and making sure employees do the same — Werth keeps PlumChoice tuned to changing needs.

"It's all about the customer," he says. "If you're not customer-focused, you absolutely will be losing touch with how it makes you successful."

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