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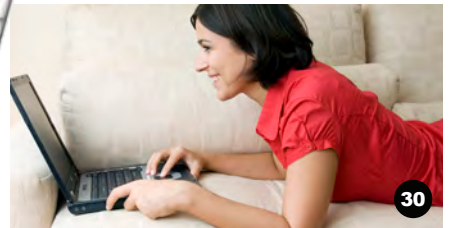
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## CONTRIBUTORS



**Tim DEWEY**  
CEO - B Virtual



**Bob LAST**  
Director of Research and Content - Redwood Collaborative



**Greg LEVIN**  
Founder and Principal - Off Center, LLC



**Peggy LIBBEY**  
CEO, President - Software Test Professionals



**Charles MCCANN**  
Director of Technology Support - Oklahoma State University



**Pete MCGARAHAN**  
Founder and President - McGarahan & Associates



**Jay MINNUCCI**  
Founder and President - Service Agility



**Are You Missing The**  
**CUSTOMER**

by Pete **McGARAHAN**

**“As customer diversity and expectations continue to broaden and differ, organizations will need to increase their efforts to “listen and talk” or engage themselves in the customer conversation.”**

# Point About CARE?

enjoy staying tuned to the ever-changing and challenging customer care market. Organizations are struggling today to adopt and adapt their service strategy from one-size-fits-all to something more dynamic, relevant, anticipatory and personal. As customer diversity and expectations continue to broaden and differ, organizations will need to increase their efforts to “listen and talk” or engage themselves in the customer conversation. Customers are experiencing a sense of emptiness as they seek service, answers to their questions, fulfillment to their order and resolution to their issues. As organizations continue to enjoy the profits created by cost-cutting, the longer-term impact will be customers not willing to extend or expand the relationship – stagnant revenue growth. It’s not too late for these service organizations to find value in the customer relationship and conversation to:

- Take the time to **listen** – for we may not know it all
- Be open to **learning** – for there is always something that we can do differently
- Challenge the team to always **improve** – for there are always continuous improvement opportunities around service quality, cost efficiencies or the effectiveness of our customer care programs.

## What does your invisible “**WELCOME**” mat say to your customers?

- Don’t contact us, we send you an invoice!
- You may have something to say to us, but we have nothing to say to you!
- We have lots of customers – take a number!
- We had to reduce our service levels to fund our executive perks!

## Ready or Not?

How important am I as a customer and do you want to provide service to me? Are you willing to commit your organization to a service strategy that has the customer top-of-mind? Are you ready to route me to your best, most available person for timely, hassle-free resolution?

My perception of the current service perspective is that my perspective was not the main priority or even considered when designing a customer service strategy. Today's customer-centric service strategy is not as obvious as the policies and procedures sometimes thrown in the face of the customer. In my time on the front-line, we used to pride ourselves with a no excuses, just solutions motto. Now it seems more like excuses trump solutions on any given day. I am reminded of the great Apollo 13 survival story where the NASA engineers are gathered and a box of spare parts is dumped on their table. The leader says, "This is what you have to work with, figure it out". Is this the typical approach that service organizations deploy when designing their customer service strategy? Service organizations reactively will look around and assemble the best of what they have to offer in terms of people, process and tools. It's a service strategy that is internally designed and central to what works best for the organization given the "box of parts" it has to work with, integrate and deliver at that moment in time. It requires the customer to continually adapt and adopt and therefore we learn nothing from the customer voice because we are not set up to always ASK-LISTEN-LEARN-DO-TELL.

**1) ASK** the customer what you can do better

**2) LISTEN** to what they tell you

**3) LEARN** from what they do

**4) DO** what they tell / teach you

**5) TELL** them what you did and why

### Do It Right

A better, more proactive approach would be to design a customer service strategy from scratch with a "clean white board" – with no preconditioned "what we can and can't do" limitations. The end resulting service design should deliver transparent, easy-to-do business with services that keep the customer in-mind all the time. Let's intelligently route the customer to their ultimate resolver sooner rather than later. Either your time will be consumed with the "groundhog day" approach to fighting fires or in a structured

and organized manner, identifying the broader customer conversation, taking a holistic approach to confidently knowing that you are servicing your customers based on their preferences / profiles / priorities. The service design should identify measures to understand why a customer

**"The customer perspective I propose to you is rewarding through retained services (revenue), expanded services (profit) and customer referrals (revenue / profit). Is that not a valued perspective?"**

is calling and give customers assurance that they are getting their problems solved. Are you sitting on the customer side of the table or at the head of the table where you normally sit? From a matter of customer perspective:

- Do you manage calls or customer relationships?
- Do your customers represent opportunities or problems?
- Explore the Possibilities / Uncover the Opportunities?
- Do you focus on talk time or resolution / results?
- Are you reactive (commodity) or strategic (value-add)?
- What's your MTTK (Mean Time to Know)?

The customer perspective I propose to you is rewarding through retained services (revenue), expanded services (profit) and customer referrals (revenue / profit). Is that not a valued perspective?

Now that I have you thinking, differently hopefully, let's lay out a plan for designing customer-centric services that improve service delivery, enhance the customer experience and lower ongoing support costs. Remember these ten action items when looking to transform your service strategy and organization with the customer in mind, front and center and with the opportunity to create a lasting relationship based on a willingness to engage in constant customer conversations.

1. **KNOW:** Position yourself to always know who is contacting you, why they are contacting you and historically, the best route to resolution.
2. **RESOLUTION:** Provide resolution closest to the customer keeping the law of continuous momentum in mind at all times!
3. **CONVERSATIONS:** Utilize those customer conversations in your systems performing real-time analysis gaining insights into customer preferences, profiles and priorities and take resulting action accordingly.
4. **ANTICIPATE:** Work proactively and intelligently; anticipate the customer's needs; and determine the most appropriate next step in delivering faster resolution.
5. **EASY:** Create a seamless, transparent and WOW customer experience (BE EZ2DOBIZ).
6. **FLEXIBLE:** Ensure your service strategy, structure, process and people can adapt and respond quickly to changing customer preferences / market conditions / competitive threats.
7. **DIFFERENTIATION:** Provide service differential through innovative integrated solutions (tools, process & people).
8. **WIN-LOSE-WHY:** Know why you win customers (attraction), why you lose them (defection) and what can you do to prevent losing them (loyalty, retention & profitability).
9. **CULTURE:** Create a service culture that values engaged and empowered employees / customers.
10. **ALIGNMENT:** Always align service strategy to business objectives and always deliver objectives based on measurable business results.



**Peter J. McGarahan** is the founder and president of McGarahan & Associates. Peter offers 27 years of IT and Business experience in optimizing and aligning the service and support organizations of the Fortune 1000 to deliver value against business objectives. His thought leadership has influenced the maturity and image of the service and support industry. His passion for customer service led the Taco Bell support organization to achieve the Help Desk Institute Team Excellence Award in 1995. IT Support News named him one of the "Top 25 Professionals in the Service and Support Industry" in 1999. Support professionals voted McGarahan "The Legend of the Year" in 2002 and again in 2004 at the Help Desk Professionals conference for his endless energy, mentoring and leadership coaching. As a practitioner, product manager and support industry analyst and expert, McGarahan has left his service signature on the support industry / community.

**“Design a customer service strategy from scratch with a ‘clean white board’ – with no preconditioned ‘what we can and can’t do’ limitations.”**