

BRITISH STANDARD

Code of practice for customer service

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Contents

Foreword *ii*

Introduction *1*

1 Scope *2*

2 Normative references *3*

3 Customer service principles *3*

4 Implementation at a structural level *4*

5 Operational recommendations *6*

6 Maintenance of customer services principles *12*

Annexes

Annex A (normative) Recruitment, competences and training of customer service employees *14*

Bibliography *16*

Summary of pages

This document comprises a front cover, an inside front cover, pages i and ii, pages 1 to 16, an inside back cover and a back cover.

Foreword

Publishing information

This British Standard was published by BSI and came into effect on 16 April 2007. It was prepared by Subcommittee SVS/1/1, *Customer service management*, under the authority of Technical Committee SVS/1, *Relationship management systems*. A list of organizations represented on this committee can be obtained on request to its secretary.

Information about this document

This British Standard discusses essential elements for establishing and managing effective customer service within an organization and makes recommendations on using these elements. It can be used by any organization, regardless of size, to establish or improve its customer service.

Use of this document

As a code of practice, this British Standard takes the form of guidance and recommendations. It should not be quoted as if it were a specification and particular care should be taken to ensure that claims of compliance are not misleading.

Any user claiming compliance with this British Standard is expected to be able to justify any course of action that deviates from its recommendations.

Presentational conventions

The provisions in this standard are presented in roman (i.e. upright) type. Its recommendations are expressed in sentences in which the principal auxiliary verb is “should”.

Commentary, explanation and general informative material is presented in smaller italic type, and does not constitute a normative element.

Contractual and legal considerations

This publication does not purport to include all the necessary provisions of a contract. Users are responsible for its correct application.

Users of this standard are reminded that many of the transactions and procedures discussed in it might also be subject to legal requirements.

Compliance with a British Standard cannot confer immunity from legal obligations.

Introduction

Change in technology, attitudes, demographics, organizations and governments has led to more wealth and consumption than has been enjoyed in any previous century.

The relationship between the customer or consumer and the organizations providing them with products and services has never been more in focus – and critical to the success of those organizations. The customer service professional – whether in a frontline role such as a retail assistant, call centre service adviser or client account manager, or in a management role such as call centre manager or customer service director – has never been more important.

Maintaining, or improving upon, customer satisfaction levels is one of the most important contributing factors in the running of a successful organization in any sector.

Harvard Business Review summarized the business benefits as the “3Rs”:

- retention;
- related sales;
- referrals.

According to research by the Institute of Customer Service, customers perceive the following elements as being the most important in service delivery:

- timeliness;
- appearance;
- courtesy;
- quality and efficiency;
- ease of doing business;
- problem solving.

These might be summarized as another set of “3Rs” which apply equally in the commercial and the public sectors, where commercial imperatives are often less pressing:

- responsive;
- reliable;
- respectful.

These factors can be translated into a set of objective benchmarks, and it is the purpose of this British Standard to offer a means by which an organization can judge itself and can be judged by its customers. It is published as a code of practice so that individual benchmarks can be clearly identified, and attainment of them can be easily verified. It does not, therefore, deal in detail with some of the vital “softer” aspects of customer satisfaction that are less susceptible to this approach; these are discussed in many other sources, and it is envisaged that they might be the subject of industry- or sector-specific BSI guidance documents in the future.

Many of the recommendations made in this code of practice will already be commonplace in organizations that have a responsive customer service culture deeply embedded within them. However, there are great numbers of organizations for which this is not true, and applying this British Standard will:

- a) aid in setting in place mechanisms to ensure levels of customer service that at least meet the needs and reasonable expectations of customers;
- b) assist organizations to be competitive in the marketplace;
- c) assist organizations to be able to differentiate their services from competitors through providing and maintaining innovative customer services;
- d) assist in increasing levels of customers' positive emotional experience with an organization's services and, through this, building and maintaining customer loyalty;
- e) increase customer retention;
- f) attract new customers through positive word of mouth;
- g) reduce marketing costs;
- h) assist organizations in increasing service efficiency;
- i) reduce complaint rates, and therefore less time and cost involved in dealing with such complaints;
- j) aid compliance with fair trading and consumer protection laws;
- k) assist public sector service providers to maintain and improve services and accountability;
- l) help create an organization-wide customer-focused approach to developing and maintaining quality services;
- m) improve the capacity of customers to deal with an organization.

Customer service culture involves being proactive by anticipating or exceeding customer needs; implementation of this standard will for many organizations be the first step in embedding this principle in all aspects of their business and operations.

1 Scope

COMMENTARY ON CLAUSE 1
In this context "organization" includes small businesses and consultancies, public or private companies, national and local government department and agencies, and not-for-profit organizations. Subject to contractual provisions, this standard also potentially applies to sub-contractors of those organizations.

This British Standard sets out essential principles for establishing and maintaining effective customer service and provides recommendations on applying these principles.

It is primarily aimed at organizations in dealing with external customers. However, the principles can also be applied by an organization in dealing with its internal customers. It is applicable to all organizations, irrespective of their size or the nature of their business.

2 Normative references

The following referenced documents are indispensable for the application of this document.

BS 8463, *Specification for customer billing practice*

BS ISO 10002, *Quality management – Customer satisfaction – Guidelines for complaints handling in organizations*

3 Customer service principles

COMMENTARY ON CLAUSE 3

A wide range of initiatives and techniques can be used to realise these principles, such as setting up interdepartmental project teams, publishing a customer service e-newsletter and having “whole of enterprise” customer standards development meetings.

Adoption of the following principles is essential to achieving effective, consistent and reliable customer service:

- a) *Commitment* – a commitment to providing effective customer service by employees at all levels within the organization is an indispensable corporate value. It should start with the board, chief executive officer and top management;
- b) *Credibility* – promises should be kept, service should be delivered at times that suit customers and robust and reliable systems should be in place for every aspect of an organization’s transactions with its customers;
- c) *Customer service culture* – customer service culture should be developed so as to become embedded in all aspects of an organization’s operations;
- d) *Competences* – people with appropriate attributes (skills, knowledge and attitudes) required of customer service professionals should be employed and these should be assessed on an ongoing basis;
- e) *Responsibility* – customer service responsibilities should be identified and assigned, with employees possessing the necessary responsibility, authority and resources to enable them to perform effectively, and at least one employee taking responsibility for customer problems;
- f) *Resources* – adequate resources should be allocated to allow a customer service culture to thrive;
- g) *Identification of customer service issues* – there should be systematic identification and management of customer service issues relevant to an organization’s operations;
- h) *Customer service quality* – the whole organization should be involved in the development and ongoing review of customer service quality, developed from a customer perspective, relevant to their area of operation;
- i) *Feedback systems* – effective feedback systems for customers and employees should be developed and maintained;
- j) *Continual improvement* – systems should be developed to ensure that the level of customer service is relevant to, or exceeds, current customer expectations;
- k) *Internal communication* – the concept of the internal customer should be fostered as it is an important element in developing a customer service culture.