ACCANect 2018

Day 2 Thursday, 13 September 2018

**Session 6: 11:15 – 11:25am**

**Can You Hear Me? – ACCAN Research Project**

**Presenter: Isabel Durie, ACCAN Policy Officer**

**ACCAN has recently conducted research to find out what telco customers are saying about customer service. In this session, Isabel Durie will highlight some of the important findings and next steps for a better, future consumer experience.**

TERESA CORBIN: I want to introduce our policy officer?, Isabel Durie who was working on the TCP code but was also one of the team who worked on a research project over the last year called can you hear me, the full-time report is available on our website is that what I have to say? Good. But otherwise I'm just going to hand over to her to tell you. We wanted to get a snapshot of what was going on with customer service before all these new reforms came into place. Take the stage. (APPLAUSE)

>> I did work in a call centre I do know about phones. There you go.

>> Thank you. It's completely dead now.

>> I didn't do it. I'll have to call Telstra, the computer's down, the phone's gone. I'll use your mobile, Kel's got mine. Hi? On hold. One of the line's down, two for external, I don't know what it is. Greensleeves. Hi Trish, yes, yes it's Kath Day-Knight, my phone lines are down and I need to be urgently contactable by a local florist at crescent. Can you narrow down the time a bit. Thank you Trish. Stuck here all day waiting for Telstra. Pineapple. Chop sticks in the pineapple. I like what I see. Must be Telstra. That's quick. Going mad? (Singing) what's that in the fan? That's the door. Oh no, Telstra, Telstra, coming! Bloody pigs. Oh. Oh, chop sticks, oh they're nice. Unusual.

ISABEL DURIE: 15 years later we may have moved on from the perm and the coloured shoulder pads but Australians are still waiting for Telstra. Only now they're also waiting for Optus and Vodafone and TPG, the list goes on. Before I continue I also like to acknowledge the that traditional owners of the land on which we meet and pay my respects to their elders past and present. Problems with customer service feature prominently in complaints made to the telecommunications industry Ombudsman. As Judy Jones said this morning, in the 2017 annual report the TIO reported just over 158,000 complaints of those almost half mention customer service as an issue. No doubt many of you have your own stories able issue, only to be transferred three times before you reach someone who has the knowledge and authority to manage your case. Then you're kindly told that they'll have to look into it and get back to you and so begins the waiting game. Earlier this year ACCAN commissioned a survey conducted with 1300 consumers customers from ten different providers with the aim of quantifying the customer service experience in the telco industry. So what did we find? We asked consumers who had contacted their provider in the past 12 months with an inquiry or issue about their experience. Whilst there were many respondents who had a straightforward and fast experience with 58% reporting their inquiry or issue resolved on first contact, those who didn't were often kept waiting a long time. So the average respondent sent 13 days seeking a resolution, had to contact their provider and were transferred only the fine three times as you can see, activate me, belong and Telstra customers all had average wait times longer than 13 days with activate me customers waiting an average of 37.6 days and for those still seeking a resolution at the time of the survey the average time they'd spent waiting blew out to two months and counting. A research revealed that the time customers spend seeking a resolution can vary significantly depending on the type of issue or inquiry. Common issues such as those relates to billing take on average 28 days to resolve while more technical issues with overseas roaming or equipment take 31 and 33 days respectively. Even if you have a simple and very common inquiry such as wanting to change our renew your plan or update your contact details, you could be left waiting up to 12 days. The majority of the respondents chose to contact their provider over the average 1.2 hours waiting on the phone before reaching the right person to talk to. As you can see, Telstra, TPG, iiNet and Belong customers all spent longer while activate me spent just over after an hour. Just over half contacting by phone were told the wait time to speak to someone and a large proportion were offered the option of a callback however of those that elected to receive a callback 17% said they never received the call. Now if you want to be strategic about getting a fast resolution listen up because the method by which you contact your provider will also impact the time you spend waiting. The fastest contact method was by going into a store. These respondents spent an average of eight days waiting for a resolution and 74% got a resolution on first contact. This was followed by social media. Those who called out their provider via social media spend 15.5 days seeking a resolution with 61% getting a first contact resolution. Next was online chat or messenger. Using live chat on a provider's website there was a wait time of.6 days with 60% getting a first contact resolution. The preferred method of contact via phone will get you a resolution in about 23.3 days with just over half of the respondents who phoned getting a resolution on first contact and finally the slowest method of contact by far is email taking an average of 30 days to get a resolution. So do you ever wonder if your telco is actually listening to you? Here is why. While 42% said their customer service representative was able to access they're case history, the rest said they needed to reprovide details of their issue on subsequent contacts, of those 34% had to reprovide some of the information with the remaining having to reprovide most of the details of their issue. These respondents were required to reprovide times. When it comes to making a complain, 19% who lodged a complaint said the process was easy, unfortunately half of those who had done so said the opposite. For respondents who looked for information about how to lodge a complaint, just over half reported that the information was difficult to find. Interestingly, the survey revealed that respondents were more likely to have made a formal complaint to their telco if they'd made contact via photocopier, between 18 and 29 years old were required to recontact their telco five or more time or their telco did not accommodate for their language needs. How do the telcos stack up against each other when it comes to customer service? We asked respondents to rate their customer service experience between extremely negative and extremely positive. Less than half of Sky Mesh, Telstra, Optus and Belong customers were positive about their experience with Belong and Activate8me scoring poorly with 36% of positive customers. At the other end of the scale Vodafone and Virgin did well with 61% and 71% of customers scoring their experience as positive. Unfortunately for those relatively happy Virgin customers the telco is no longer in the market. So where do we go with this? Our research into the quantity of customer service offered by the industry reveals a strong need for improvements across the board. Telecommunications is an essential service and when customers experience issues or have an inquiry they both require and deserve a fast and simple path to resolution. ACCAN would like to see increased first contact resolution shorter wait times and better record keeping to decrease the number of times customers have to repeat their case information. Improvements in these areas will hopefully pave the way for relationship between telcos and their customers. And I leave you again with Kath Day-knight who managed to find a silver lining in waiting for Telstra.

>> A toast to Kath, a foxiest florist.

>> Floral designer please.

>> This side of Fountain Lakes, she's taken out first prize for her absurdist piece waiting for Telstra. To Kath.

>> Mrs D. I just take scenarios from my daily life vis-a-vis waiting for Telstra to turn up, the fluff from the shower fan, that just hit me when I opened the fridge. Literally.

TERESA CORBIN: There's a lot more conversations going on with the telcos directly about that research and it's been really good conversation starter