

Accenture High Tech Solutions

Customer Service and Support


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Part One: Customers Versus Companies

In the first installment of a three-part series on customer service in the technology industry, we draw on three comprehensive Accenture surveys to explore the extent of the customer service challenge facing high-tech providers by illustrating the disparity between the views of customers and the perspectives of business executives. The results should be eye-opening for any executive concerned with growing a high-tech business.

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Superior customer service is one of the hallmarks of high-performance businesses. Yet Accenture has found while companies applaud themselves for the “improvements” they have made in their service capabilities, their customers are desperately seeking—and often finding—alternative providers of today’s most desired high-tech products.

There’s a considerable difference between how companies and customers perceive the state of customer service, as well as in the service priorities expressed by each group.

Senior executives of leading global high-tech companies who participated in Accenture’s technology industry customer support & service surveys believe customers’ service expectations have increased substantially in recent years. When asked to rate the degree to which their customers’ expectations for service and support is increasing (on a scale of 1 = increasing to a small extent and 10 = increasing to a large extent), three-fourths of executives surveyed gave a rating of 8.

Yet despite executives’ tacit acknowledgment that customers want much more from their service interactions with providers, companies and consumers differ dramatically in their impressions about several aspects of service—with the most striking difference relating to service quality. High-tech executives in Accenture’s survey think the after-sale service and support their companies provide is well above average, and many believe their companies’ efforts have kept pace with customer expectations. In fact, 80 percent of executives polled said they would describe the customer service satisfaction of their overall customer base as moderately or extremely high, with 54 percent rating their service and support an 8 or higher on a scale of 1 = very poor to 10 = excellent.

Furthermore, three-fourths of executives said customers’ satisfaction with the service they receive is above average, with 57 percent estimating it was moderately high and 17 percent saying it was extremely high. And when asked to compare their company’s performance to their competitors, 54 percent of the surveyed executives said that their customer service capabilities are among the best in the industry.

But consumers have a different opinion. Many, in fact, believe companies are falling far short of their expectations for customer service from providers of high-tech products and services, as evidenced by the following statistics from Accenture’s technology industry customer support & service surveys:

- 57 percent of consumers described themselves as somewhat upset, very upset or extremely upset when they accessed customer service channels from such providers
- 78 percent of consumers still believe their provider’s customer service is at or below the level of service offered by competitors

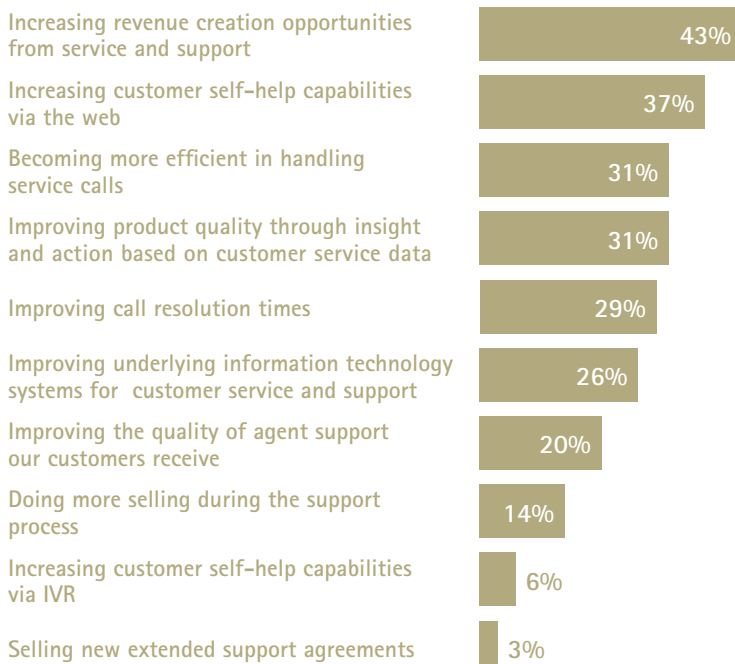
And those are not the only areas of disparity between companies and their customers. For instance, 77 percent of high-tech executives reported having implemented new customer self-service capabilities within the past two years—and believe these new capabilities have had a very positive impact on the organization: Ninety-three percent said they’ve seen faster resolution of customer problems and 74 percent said they now have higher customer satisfaction. But one gets a different impression talking with customers. Nearly half (46 percent)

of the consumers in the survey said they have had to access customer service channels between two and four times to resolve their problems, and 18 percent said they have had to do so more than four times. And, despite companies’ “new capabilities,” one-third of consumers rated their customer service experience with such providers about the same as—and 22 percent said it was worse than—two years ago (only 14 percent rated their experience “much better”). Overall, 61 percent of consumers believe technology has not improved the service they receive from high-tech companies.

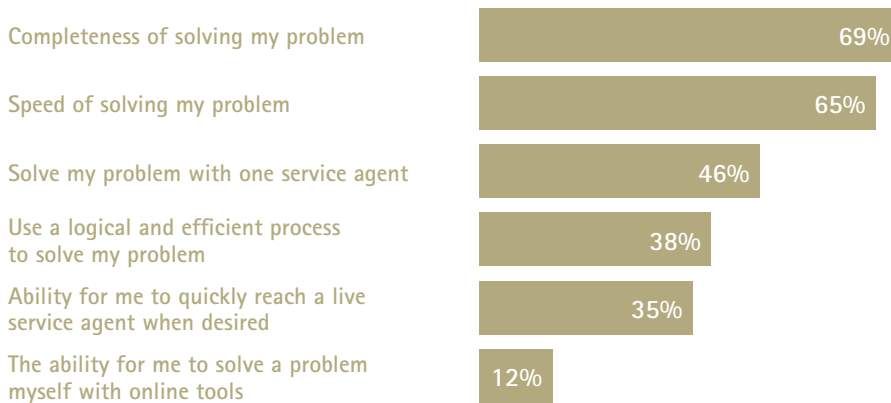
Furthermore, when looking at the service agendas for companies and their customers, it’s apparent that the two groups aren’t even close to being on the same page (see figure). For instance, consumers’ two most important wishes for customer service are to have their problem solved completely (ranked first, cited by just under 70 percent of respondents) and quickly (ranked second, named by 65 percent). Conversely, the top service agenda item for companies—increasing revenue opportunities from service and support—is completely company-centric and has little to do with customers. Similarly, while only 11 percent of consumers said they value the ability to solve a problem themselves with online tools, nearly 40 percent of high-tech executives said increasing customer self-help capabilities via the Web was a top-three agenda item for them in the coming year (good enough for second place on their list).

Top customer service priorities: companies versus customers

Companies' top priorities



Consumers' top priorities



Accenture research contributing to this report

Our insights presented in this report are rooted in comprehensive, ongoing research that Accenture conducts on related topics — as well as on our extensive client work in the customer service and support arena.

The research efforts we've drawn on for this series include:

- Accenture technology industry customer service & support surveys (2006 and 2007): Surveys of two separate audiences — executives at 35 global technology companies and 1,200 consumers in Italy, United Kingdom, France, Germany, Japan and the United States — on aspects of customer support and service. Consumers were polled on their perceptions gleaned from over 1900 technology-related service incidents, which could include Internet access, telephony (wireline and wireless), consumer electronics, computer equipment, and software.
- Accenture Customer Service Survey (2005 and 2006): Survey of more than 2,000 consumers in the United States and United Kingdom on perceptions of customer service across 10 types of providers, including high-tech and communications products and services providers.

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