

British Stiff Upper Lip Hinders Good Service



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British reserve is preventing UK businesses from receiving the customer service they expect and deserve. A YouGov survey conducted for Easynet, the international managed network and hosting company, has found one in three British businesses do not speak up even when strongly dissatisfied, while one third of Britons said they would just put up with bad service.

The study of over 1,666 large enterprises across seven European countries¹ reveals the British are the most reluctant in Europe to communicate their dissatisfaction directly. This stifles a valuable source of feedback for the supplying companies. Of those surveyed, the British were the least likely to deal with suppliers face to face at only 1% but most likely to tell colleagues about any poor customer service experiences, at 67 percent.

In contrast, across the rest of Europe the Germans are the best at addressing their customer service concerns directly. Over a third of them will speak their mind to their suppliers and ultimately switch to a new company if the problem isn't dealt with.

A new guide to customer service - A Guide to Getting Good Service, available at www.easynet.com/thecustomerexperience - aims to encourage 'speaking up' and gives businesses advice about how to get the most from their business partners.

Martin Molloy, European customer service management director, Easynet, said: "British reserve can get in the way of good customer service. Unless a company creates an environment that encourages feedback, people are unlikely to raise issues. The British have high expectations, yet we are the least likely in Europe to complain, which helps no-one! So hearing nothing from your customers doesn't mean you're providing a great service. Providing an open forum and encouraging customer feedback not only sorts out problems more quickly, it helps companies improve their services."

The customer service gap across Europe

Bad customer service isn't just a UK problem. The message from businesses across Europe is that there is a gap between what customers expect, and what they receive. A significant proportion said being dealt with quickly is their most valued aspect of excellent customer service, but they are as likely to receive bad service as good.

Only 38% of companies reported that they always found it easy to contact suppliers directly.

All countries found being caught in an automated telephone system far more annoying than being overcharged.

When it came to higher levels of customer service the picture was even more damning. Only 35% said they were always treated with respect, only a quarter said their suppliers understood their market and a mere 24% of suppliers always took the time to build a good relationship.

Lynda King Taylor, director, The Performance Trust commented, "There are clear consistencies across Europe that point to service gaps between what customers say they want, and what they get. This could either be a difference in perception on the part of the customers, or a real difference between what they want and what they receive. In reality this distinction doesn't matter, because it's up to service suppliers to ensure customers get good service and know they get it."



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She continued, "A reputation for customer service - good or bad - can materially affect business. Perhaps in the light of these results, companies must consider whether they're really addressing their customers' needs. Failure to do this could at best lessen goodwill towards the supplier, and at worst damage the balance sheet if customers take their custom elsewhere or tell people to do likewise. But a well-matched experience, taking into account customers' concerns and acting on them, could have an equally powerful positive effect."

What do we want?

Across Europe, there was a strong preference for personal customer service, with almost two thirds (62%) of respondents being most annoyed at being caught in an automated telephone system, with four countries stating it was the most annoying factor contributing to bad customer service - as shown below:

Country	%
UK	75
Germany	73
Netherlands	69
Italy	63

The next most annoying thing a supplier can do is to keep its customers on hold, with 47% of respondents rating this as a major annoyance. This figure did vary country by country, with 73% of Germans annoyed at being put on hold compared to just under a third of the French respondents.

And what happens if we don't get it....

According to the research, when asked how they react to bad service:

- ❖ the Italians and Spanish are most likely to complain to the supplier straight away (51 percent)
- ❖ the Dutch are the least likely to complain generally (22 percent)
- ❖ the British are the most likely to feel frustrated but not do anything about it (29 percent), and the most likely to not pursue compensation (96 percent).
- ❖ Germans are most likely to switch suppliers (35 percent).
- ❖ The French and Spanish are the most likely to stay loyal to suppliers (95 percent).

When asked who they would generally tell about bad service:

- ❖ The British are most likely to tell colleagues (67 percent). All other countries would tell the supplier of bad service.
- ❖ Germans are most likely to tell friends and relatives (27 percent), and to let other customers of the supplier know about their poor experiences (29 percent)
- ❖ Belgians are the most likely to say they receive good customer service (71 percent)
- ❖ Belgians are also the most likely to say they are satisfied with their service (69 per cent)



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