

erencing iTV, which is predicted to be in one out of four homes by 2004. When customers with iTV capabilities dial in, the agent asks them to turn to a specific channel. The customer can then see the operator via a direct, private transmission. While talking to the customer, the agent can also display products as well as related charts or images.

Another capability that customer service operations will have to handle is IM. Gartner estimates that IM will be used in 70% of enterprises by 2003, and it's inevitable that such capabilities will be extended to customers. Companies need to begin integrating IM into customer service and other processes to enable them to operate as real-time enterprises.

The outsourcing debate will continue. Outsourcing advocates argue service and support is not a core competency. Others argue that customer contact is required to build relationships. A similar debate has raged over IT outsourcing. Large companies outsourced IT functions, but many brought them back in-house when they realized they had lost control and the ability to learn from applying technology strategically. There will be a huge wave of customer service outsourcing in the next few years, and then the pendulum will swing back to in-house control. Ultimately, growth in customer equity requires dealing with customers directly.

## TAKEAWAYS

- What are your short- and long-term customer service plans? How are you trying to own the customer experience? Is customer service provided on customer terms?
- How responsive is customer service? Is responsiveness measured in hours or days? Are inquiries generally handled in a single call?
- Can the call center handle Web inquiries? Are there plans to create a contact center with chat and other capabilities?
- Is staffing consistent with customer requirements for service? What are customer service metrics? Are they based on corporate efficiencies or customer effectiveness? Can customers "grade" your service?
- Do you have an email management system that includes intelligent routing? What percentage of emails are answered

(continued on next page)

(Takeaways continued)

correctly and grammatically in six hours or less?

- How strong is your customer service culture? How are employees encouraged to adopt a commitment to service?
- How well are customer service representatives trained? How much authority do they have to resolve customer issues? What is being done to reduce customer service and other turnover?

## RESOURCES

### Information

*Achieving Excellence Through Customer Service* by John Tschohl. (Best Sellers, 1996).

*Best Practices in Customer Service* by Ron Zemke & John Woods. (Amacom, 1999).

*Monitoring, Measuring and Managing Customer Service* by Gary Goodman. (Jossey-Bass, 2000).

*Online Customer Care: Strategies for Call Center Excellence* by Michael Cusack. (American Society for Quality, 1998).

*Customer Interaction Solutions* (tmcnet.com/cis)

*Sales & Marketing* (salesandmarketing.com)

Help Desk Institute (helpdeskinst.com)

Shop.org (shop.org)

Software Support Professionals Association (supportgate.com)

Teleplaza (teleplaza.com)

### Solutions

Avaya (avaya.com), Benchmark Portal (benchmarkportal.com), CustomerSat (customersat.com), eGain (egain.com), E-Share Technologies (eshare.com), Feedback Direct (feedbackdirect.com), Firepond (firepond.com), General Interactive (interactive.com), HumanClick (humanclick.com), Icontact (heyinc.com), Investigative Marketing, (investigativemarketing.com), LivePerson (liveperson.com), PeopleSupport.com (peoplesupport.com), Precision Response (prcnet.com), RightNow Technologies (rightnowtech.com), ServiceWare Technologies (serviceware.com)