



Competitive Analysis and Best Practices in Customer Self-Service

Project Sponsor

TDS Telecom

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Executive Summary

TDS Telecom is a major player in the regional telecom market with a historic emphasis on customer service. To enhance service to customers via multiple channels, the company is interested in improving its Interactive Voice Response (IVR) and online self-service offerings. The objective of this UW student-team project is therefore to assist TDS Telecom in enhancing the self-service capabilities for residential customers via the Web and IVR by performing a competitive analysis and research on leading practices.

The UW Project Team endeavored to address each of the self-service capabilities (IVR and online self-help) and then divided each into “same-industry” and “out-of-industry” analysis. Leading-edge practice was sought across all of these groups, along with suitable benchmarks, for the purpose of creating actionable recommendations for TDS.

IVR Methods and Findings

IVR analysis was carried out four ways. A usability analysis and competitive analysis were performed on eleven of TDS’s peers and competitors. The aim of these analyses was to identify key offerings within the industry and establish an understanding of the variability between IVR systems. Interviews with process owners and a best practice analysis were also performed to identify faults in the current TDS IVR system and provide insight into what is contained within a leading practice IVR tree. Recommendations were based on the findings from the above analyses and were tailored towards TDS business plan.

Online self-help Methods and Findings

Same-industry research was conducted via a quantitative analysis that measured rival telecom companies’ online support sites in terms of accessibility of information and clarity of design. Key findings and recommendations included points such as the standardization of layout and menu bar, a bill translation page, and the placement of an add/change services link. Out-of-industry research was conducted by benchmarking against several companies known for their outstanding support, such as Zappos.com. These were ranked against specific criteria culled from professional service associations, and analyzed for anecdotal best-practice issues. Recommendations included that call center service be maintained, if even as a migration tool; that the user interface be personalized, and that they actively monitor and maintain their online service offerings.

Conclusions

The conclusions reached by the UW Project Team are twofold: First, that while there are a variety of tools with which to meet customer needs, “fit” is what makes a system work. Specific IVR and online recommendations should only be implemented inasmuch as they fill that role. Second, that TDS should not forget the role of good follow-through as well. That is, IVR and online self-help are only communication tools; the lasting impression on the customer is defined by the actions TDS takes as a follow-up to address the customer service issues.

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Table of Contents

1 Interactive Voice Response (IVR)	5
1.1 IVR Project Methodology	5
1.1.1 Competitive Analysis	5
1.1.2 Usability Analysis	6
1.1.3 Interviews	6
1.1.4 Best Practice Analysis.....	7
1.2 IVR Findings.....	7
1.3 IVR Recommendations.....	10
2 Online Self-Help (same industry)	12
2.1 Online Support Methodology	12
2.1.1 Competitive Analysis	12
2.2 Online Support Findings.....	13
2.3 Online Support Recommendations.....	15
2.3.1 Online Support Features to Host	15
2.3.2 Site Format Considerations.....	15
3 Online Self-Help (out-of-industry)	16
3.1 Online Best Practice Methodology.....	16
3.2 Who decides best practice?	16
3.3 What are the best practices?	16
3.4 Overview of rankings.....	17
3.4.1 Cisco: Complete Support	17
3.4.2 Google: Effective and Well-maintained.....	18
3.4.3 Zappos: Support Is Our Business.....	18
3.4.4 Expedia: The Bigger Picture	18
3.4.5 Boomers As Proxy: Digital Immigrants	18
3.5 Recommendations	19
4 Conclusion	20