

# Combining customer service and sales into a Special Duty Unit

In customer services, getting ahead of your competitors means more than just doing better. It also requires a mindset that thinks out of the box. That's what made Hong Kong Broadband Network a success.

Take, for instance, dialing the customer services hotline. It can be quite a hassle when you are looking for help in more than one area. For example, you want to know more about a certain product and also check your accounts. In most cases, you will need to make one call to the sales department and another to the customer service executive.

That's where Hong Kong Broadband Network Ltd (HKBN) made a revolutionary enhancement in its customer service - and won the Integrated Support Team of the Year 2006 (Telecommunications) in the corporate award category, as well as five Merit awards in customer service in this year's Customer Relationship Excellence Award.

"This is HKBN's second consecutive year to excel in the Customer Relationship Excellence Awards. Last year, we were also an award recipient of 'Call Centre of the Year' and 'Customer Service Centre of the Year'," said William Yeung, Chief Operating Officer of HKBN. "These show that our consistently outstanding performance has been recognized. This year, our customer services department has undergone a change in structure with the implementation of the SDU system. Winning these awards highlights the capability of our customer service executives, as well as our leading position in customer services in the telecommunications industry."

Fully implemented in April 2007, the "Special Duty Unit" (SDU) customer care system was introduced by HKBN in which a personal cus-



William Yeung  
Chief Operating Officer, Hong Kong Broadband Network Limited

tommer care executive is assigned to each residential broadband customer, each with a dedicated service contact number. Similar to an account manager, the customer care executive provides one-stop service on both customer services and product sales.

The launch of the SDU meant a merger of capability in customer services and sales. To HKBN's customer service staff, this required a change of mindset as well as learning new skills, both of which posed great challenges to William.

"Customer service staff are more inverted and mild. They have to learn to be more proactive and assertive so as to introduce to customers our range of products, which includes broadband, fixed line

telephony and pay TV services. Learning selling skills, product knowledge, competitors' products and market trends is vital as well.

Sales staff, on the other hand, are comparatively more ambitious. They need to learn to be patient and speak tactfully to grumpy customers, and learn how to do follow ups, a task which may seem tedious to them," he said.

Training, workshops and individual coaching lasted a full year. Now its customer services center, located in Guangzhou, is fully geared up for the next phase of the SDU customer care system, in which customers will enjoy direct and convenient communications with their respective customer service executives via video conferencing using HKBN's cutting-

edge 2b broadband phone system. This service will be fully launched in the third quarter of this year.

According to William, good customer service not only creates happy customers, but also a win-win-win situation for the company, its staff and its customers.

"With our new SDU system, our customer service executives will establish a long term relationship with their clients and provide personal services for them. For instance, if an issue cannot be resolved during the day, the customer service executive will SMS the client after office hours, so as not to keep the client waiting over the weekend," he said.

He further explained that increased customer satisfaction will retain the customer at HKBN, which will also reduce the rate of customer loss, establish a good reputation in the industry, and bring in more referrals and cross selling opportunities.

Customer service executives have their salary and promotions linked to the number of customers in hand. In other words, they are motivated to keep their customers happy, and in turn receive a remuneration and a career that will make them happy as well. And when they are happy with their jobs, they will remain in the company, which means reduced staff turnover.

A good front line staff is only one of the factors that contribute to good customer service. William pointed out two other important factors that led to HKBN's success in the telecommunications industry: the system and the workflow. "Our operations system is constantly undergoing improvements and upgrades so

that front line staff can easily and swiftly retrieve information and obtain the latest updates," he said. "As for workflow, we maintain a simple and direct workflow system that keeps the number of steps and transfers to a minimum."

Apart from the "staff-system-workflow" relationship, successful customer services also require leadership skills. William said, "The telecommunications industry is highly competitive. That's why we focus on the leadership skills of our middle management and team leaders. They need to motivate their subordinates to excel and exceed the expectations of the company."

In addition, a corporate culture that encourages staff to do their best is pivotal for success. Meanwhile, the company also promotes internal communication between staff, enhancing interflow not only in new technology, but also between its Hong Kong headquarters and its Guangzhou customer services centre.

Earlier this year, HKBN launched two new broadband services - bb50 (symmetric 50 Mbps) and bb200 (symmetric 200 Mbps), in sync with the company's commitment to provide ultra high speed, stable and symmetrical bandwidth broadband services. To support of this quality broadband service, the SDU personalized customer care system was introduced.

"SDU also means Service Devoted to U, which reinforces the company's mission: 'Care from the heart, Serve with swift actions,'" he concluded.



Good front line staff is a key to HKBN's outstanding customer service



Dedicated customer care executive would be assigned to each customer under the SDU system