

# DM NEWS

The Online Newspaper of Record for Direct Marketers

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## *More Customer Service Heartbreak*

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**By: Tad Clarke**  
**Editor in Chief**

Bad customer service is rampant. Young people are so used to lousy customer service they've come to expect it. A new survey from Ernan Roman Direct Marketing found that bad customer care call center experiences negatively affect a person's perception of the company (83 percent), likelihood to recommend the company to others (77 percent) and willingness to buy from that company (72 percent). That can really hurt the bottom line, so why don't companies do more?

As Don Libey wrote in a two-part DM Views piece for us last month, customer service has eroded over the past two decades to where today's customer has almost "zero expectations as a learned and conditioned response." Don says the feedback he received was probably the most he's gotten on any article he has written. Don cited three influences; expectation, the Internet and price. I'll add three more:

1. Call center hell. Who likes being treated like a number? "Press one for this." "Press two for that." If this automation isn't annoying enough, employers know call center workers will leave after a few months so they don't invest the time, training and money that's needed. This is why respondents to Ernan's survey used words like "frustrating," "exasperating" and "wasted time" when describing their customer care experiences.
2. CRM and online illusions. To avoid call center hell, we go online and revel in the illusion that our wishes are being fulfilled instantaneously when in all actuality, nothing's happening. Companies bought applications, but software can't fix the problem either.
3. Lifetime value? Fuggedaboutit. Companies are too focused on the short-term bottom line. "We're not acting like we understand that it's seven to 10 times more expensive to get a new customer versus servicing and existing one," Ernan told me. "Instead, companies are missing two very important metrics: customer satisfaction and lifetime value. If we measure those properly, sales follow."

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With young people, Don and Ernan had similar thoughts. Don said that if they've only known zero customer service, then that's the norm. Ernan said young people were "raised" on automated menus and are less likely to have their opinions of a company swayed by poor experiences. If this is true, it sounds like we have only one thing to look forward to.

If you're interested in taking Ernan Roman's survey, go to [www.erdm.com](http://www.erdm.com) and click on "Customer Care Call Center Survey" at the bottom left of the home page.

