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International Organization for Standardization
Международная Организация по Стандартизации



Our ref. ISO/TMB

TO THE ISO MEMBER BODIES

Date 2011-10-10

PRELIMINARY ENQUIRY: Customer contact centres

Dear Sir or Madam,

At its last meeting, the Technical Management Board noted a proposal for a new work item prepared by the Consumer Policy Committee (COPOLCO) on *Guidelines for customer contact centres* and requested the ISO Central Secretariat to carry out a preliminary enquiry to assess the interest of stakeholders other than consumers in such an activity.

A copy of the proposed new work item is attached for information only. Any member body who is willing to provide secretariat services for a project committee if ISO decides to proceed with standardization on this subject, is invited to inform the TMB Secretariat.

The purpose of this enquiry is accordingly to request that you consult with stakeholders within your country to determine whether they are in agreement that ISO undertake work on this subject and more importantly whether they would be willing to commit to participation in the development of the proposed International Standard.

We would appreciate receiving your responses to tmb@iso.org by **10 January 2012** so that the TMB can decide at its meeting in February whether to formally submit the proposal for voting by the ISO member bodies.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Clivio', written over a horizontal line.

Sophie Clivio
Manager, Technical Policy
Secretary of the Technical Management Board

Enclosure



NEW WORK ITEM PROPOSAL FOR ISO – GUIDANCE FOR CUSTOMER CONTACT CENTERS

1 Title of proposal

Guidance for Customer Contact Centers (Call Centers)

2 Scope of proposed project

The standard is intended for use by business process service centers: including front end voice, multi-media and back office service providers, and including all customer contact centers (call centers), whether an in-house (captive) center or a third party operator (outsourcer).

3 Purpose

To provide specified interaction guidance for any front end voice, multi-media or back office client/customer interaction with a business process service center.

4 Justification

ISO/COPOLCO/DEVCO conducted a survey in 2009/10 on Customer Contact Centers (Call Centers) which identified the following issues:

Inbound interactions – Calls and on-line (e-mail, web, including social media)

- Contact number, e-mail, web address is not freely available – not well advertised
- Center numbers just ring and are not answered or are engaged (busy tone)
- Written communication (e-mail, web, fax, white/snail mail) are not responded to or are too slow
- Wait time for calls to be answered – too long
- Interaction with the IVR (Interactive Voice Response) or pre-talk selection tool is troublesome, e.g. places the consumer into a loop or does not offer the option required
- Lack of consultant/customer service representative (CSR) training and empowerment – consultant/CSR not able to answer query directly and having to escalate the call/interaction
- Systems down time and consultant/CSR not able to resolve the query, no FCR (first call resolution)
- Incorrect or misleading information is given out by consultant/CSR
- Not every customer service center has a toll-free or share-cost line available and the consumer has to pay for the entire call
- Failure from brands to provide an alternate means of contact besides the phone
- Failures to address consumers' language resulting in communication difficulties
- Refusal to allow third party communication despite the consumer's permission being granted

Outbound interactions

Consumers frustrated when contacted by a sales agent when:

- The consumer is on an official 'Do Not Contact' privacy list
- When the consumer is not interested in the product or does not want to buy
- The consumer is unable to understand the sales agent – unclear, inarticulate verbal communication

- The consumer is called after 'decent' hours
- The consumer is exposed to "white noise" i.e. wait time while the agent picks up the call after an automatic/predictive dialler has made contact with the consumer.

Responses received in support of an international standard or guidance include:

- An international code would reinforce standards and regulations
- It would provide a framework on which national standards can be based
- International standard or guidance could help deal with all customer queries, complaints.

The results of the survey show that very similar customer 'frustrations' and needs exist globally. National and regional standards have already been drafted which will be most useful in establishing global guidelines on best practice when communicating with customers / consumers across a multitude of supplier interaction points.

The respondents to the survey indicated only a moderate level of satisfaction among the general public with customer contact centers, the results being grouped around "more good than bad" and "more bad than good" with only a single response of "mostly good." This indicates considerable scope for improvement.

Of the respondents, 65% believed there is a definite need for an International Standard or Guide, while a further 17% felt there is a possible need. Only a single respondent indicated that there was no need.

Among those respondents who had implemented standards or regulations in this field, 38% recorded definite improvements, while a further 54% indicated that it was still too early to tell. Only a single respondent reported no improvement, the reason being that the particular regulation addressed consumer protection rather than the standard of service.

Most of the regulations / guides already in existence cover in-bound service centers with fewer having looked at out-bound, fulfilment (walk in) or back office centers.

A guideline standard on Customer Contact Centers will provide a best practice guide to all centers dealing with customers, advising on customer frustration touch points such as minimum wait times, advertising visible contact numbers, e-mails, web addresses' offering consumers an easy, non stressful and affordable way of interacting with a brand.

5 Suggested standards framework requirements

- Customer service level metrics (measurement criteria), including % of calls answered, and maximum waiting times
- Recommended or suggested minimum customer service levels (non-normative), including considerations for toll-free access in order to build customer loyalty
- Recommendations specifying customer satisfaction levels (non-normative)
- Guidance on relevant management system aspects, including the need to avoid high turnover in executive positions
- Guidance on process management systems, including
 - customer enquiry records and enquiry reference numbers
 - review of recorded calls on a sampling basis to identify good and bad practices
 - setting minimum criteria for executive oversight to maintain performance levels
- A complaints handling system (e.g. based on ISO 10002) to be put in place, including the possibility to submit complaints in writing.
- Quality based Management of IVR (Interactive Voice Response)
- Use of checklists to identify critical situations and to direct callers to the customer care executives
- Allocation of specific employees to critical situations; and qualitative and quantitative criteria for performance evaluation of employees.
- Accessibility for all relevant consumers to each center, taking affordability into account

- A focus on persons with disabilities (users and operators) – accessibility to the environment and relevant productivity and interaction tools
- Framework on recruitment and qualifications
- Framework on training
- Framework on processes, including guidance on a protocol for a "do not call" list to respect the wishes of users who do not want to be contacted.
- Privacy considerations, including data integrity and avoidance of data misuse

6 Potential benefits of standards

For consumers, benefits of standards will include:

- Affordable and stress-free interaction with a company or brand across a variety of communications
- Ease of access
- Reduced wait times
- Reduced response / conclusion times of queries

For suppliers, benefits of standards will include:

- Increased brand loyalty
- Increased staff productivity, effectiveness and efficiency
- Reduced costs assisting to increase profits
- International benchmarks
- Improvement in the field of social responsibility

7 Relevant documents to be considered

- South Africa
 1. SANS 900-1: 2008, *Business process outsourcing and offshoring operations, Part 1: Outbound contact centre operations.*
 2. SANS 990-2: 2008, *Business process outsourcing and offshoring operations, Part 2: Inbound contact centre operations.*
 3. SANS 990-3: 2008, *Business process outsourcing and offshoring operations, Part 3: Back-office processing operations.*
- Germany
 - *Leitfaden für eine verbraucherfreundliche Kundenbetreuung, Zweiter nationaler IT-Gipfel (10. Dezember 2007), Arbeitsgruppe 8 „Service- und verbraucherfreundliche IT“ (in German only)*
- European Union
 - EN 15838: 2009 – *Customer contact centres - Requirements for service provision*
- Republic of Korea
 - KSS1006-1: 2006 *Call center services*
 - KSS1006-2: 2006 *Call center services – Requirements*

8 Commitments

At the 32nd Meeting of ISO/COPOLCO – 25-28 May 2010 in Kuta, Bali, Indonesia, SABS indicated its willingness to provide the secretariat for such a project and BIS expressed interest to provide leadership.