

How to make customers happy: Study evaluates call centers

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How do customers evaluate the performance of service hotlines? Credit: Jan-Peter Kasper/FSU

Are you having trouble with the dishwasher? Or with a computer, that doesn't work as it should do? Or with an incomprehensible instruction manual for the new book shelf? No problem – there is a service hotline for cases like these after all. But if you call them, in most cases you won't be able to talk to someone close by, but you will be transferred to a call center abroad instead. To cut costs many companies have not only moved their production units, but also their customer services departments to cheaper offshore locations.

But the question is: what impact does this have on the service performance of a call-center? "According to prevailing opinion: a negative one," says Prof. Gianfranco Walsh from Friedrich Schiller

University Jena (Germany). In his experience, "most customers contacting a call-center abroad expect communication problems and a lack of customer orientation". Prof. Walsh and his colleagues show in a new study published in *International Business Review* that they are in the wrong.

The fear or suspicion of bad performances from offshore service centers is unjustified as the economists of Jena University, EBS Business School Oestrich-Winkel (Germany) and the Bowling Green State University (USA) are able to point out. "Contrary to previous assumptions the results of our study show that the evaluation of the performance of call centers abroad is not necessarily worse than that of domestic call centers," Simon Brach from Jena University says. "It doesn't influence service performance outcomes from our point of view if the customers speak to a call center in Germany or abroad," the researcher from Prof. Walsh's team stresses.

The researchers interviewed more than 800 customers of German speaking call centers with locations in Germany, Poland and Turkey for their study. They examined how the location of the call center, the perceived accent of the call center agents and their customer orientation were reflected in the customers' assessment of the call center's performance. Assessment criteria were, amongst others, the customer satisfaction relating to the agent's service, the trust put into them and if the customers were at the end willing to recommend the service hotline in question. While customers clearly perceived the different accent in the case of foreign call centers, this was scarcely of any importance to them in the evaluation of the service provided by the agents. Knowledge of the location – in the home country or abroad – was no reason to complain about the consulting [service](#) for most customers. The results of the new study show that the only decisive criterion for a positive evaluation was the [customer](#) orientation of the call center agents. Therefore, the economists recommend companies to put a stronger focus

on this aspect when they are recruiting call center staff – no matter if in Germany or abroad.

More information: Walsh G. et al. What the eye does not see, the mind cannot reject: Can call-center location explain differences in customer evaluations? International Business Review 2011, [DOI: 10.1016/j.ibus-rev.2011.11.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ibus-rev.2011.11.002)

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