Ring Of Truth - Automated Phone Systems Top Britain's List Of Financial Service Frustrations

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It's a complaint with a familiar ring to it, and now Mintel's latest research confirms that automated telephone systems are the nation's number one financial service irritation.

Indeed, when asked what annoys them most about their dealings with financial services firms, over half (56%) of Brits rank automated phone systems as the number one cause of frustration.

Meanwhile, overseas call centres (53%) and constant attempts to sell additional products (29%) make up the top three complaints regarding the financial services sector.

Other causes of aggravation include it being impossible to speak directly to people at the branch (21%), not explaining the terms and conditions in plain English (19%) and never being able to talk to the same person twice (18%).

Toby Clark, Head of Finance at Mintel said:
"Financial institutions should not underestimate the effect of a human voice, which can go a long way to soothe customer relations and it seems that automated telephone systems are high on the list of frustrating experiences for today's consumer. Brits are also strongly opposed to overseas call centres, but it's not just the language that causes problems. Many believe that overseas workers simply don't have a good enough grasp of the UK's financial system, and struggle with non-conventional requests. There are also signs that people are frustrated with what they see as a move away from traditional personal service to a more aggressive sales culture."

Around a quarter of us believe we have been let down or treated unfairly by financial services organisations over the last few years. And while most disappointed customers do act on their complaints, a sizeable minority (22%) suffer in silence.

"These customers who feel let down but who do not actually do anything about it are potentially just as damaging as those who voice their concerns, in that the company in question never gets the chance to address the complaint. Yet more damaging are those customers who simply switch accounts (or do not renew) as a result of poor service, without letting the company know what prompted the move." Toby continues.

Overall, the most common reaction to poor service is to write a letter of complaint â€“ a course taken by more than a quarter (28%) of those who felt that they had been let down.

The risk of reputational damage is clear, though, with a quarter complaining not to the firm in question, but to friends and family (24%).

Meanwhile, around the same number of this dissatisfied group (23%) has moved their account, while (15%) have complained to the Financial Ombudsman Service.

When it comes to trust, banks top the list of most trusted financial services firms (59%), followed by building societies (33%).

"People seem to have more faith in the customer service of the firms that they've actually used - when it comes to insurers, for example, those who have actually had to make a claim are generally much more positive than the public as a whole. This presents a real challenge for firms looking to take on established names in the current account market. For example, people might trust retailers to offer good service and value when it comes to groceries, for example, but it doesn't mean that they're going to trust them to beat the established banks when it comes to treating current account customers well." Toby concludes.

Source: Mintel Oxygen Reports

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